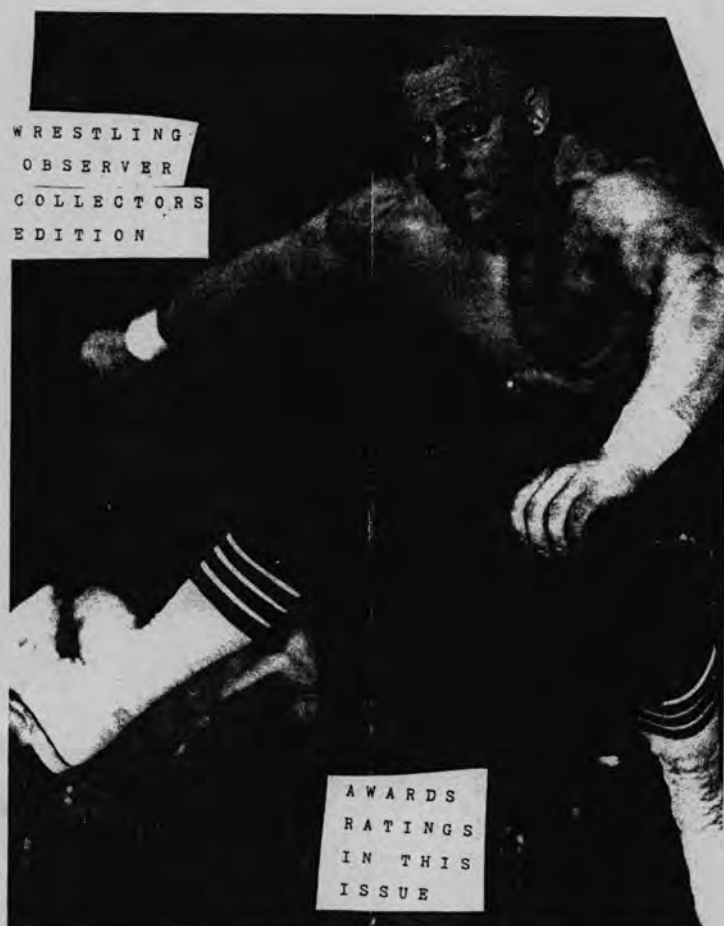


# Best of the Wrestling Observer 1983-1987

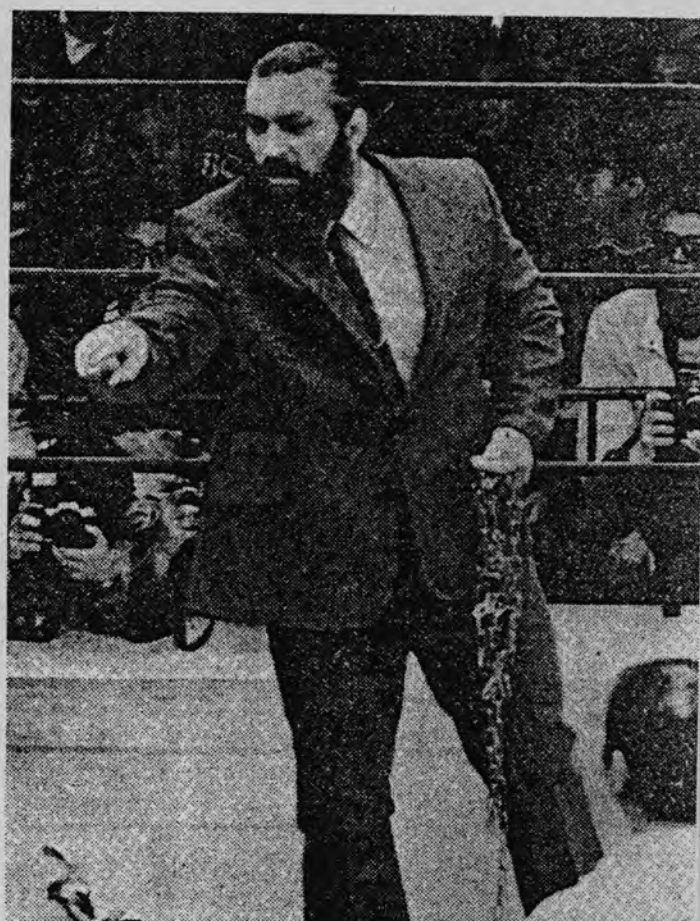
By Dave Meltzer

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Illustrated by Mr. Mike



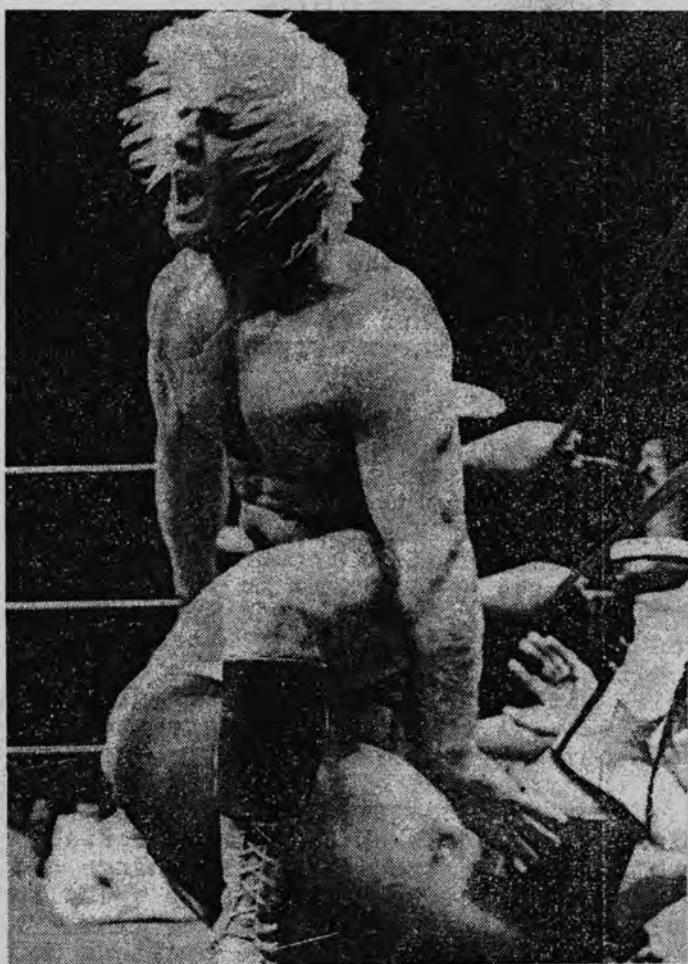
**Dynamite Kid**



**Brody**



**Tiger Mask**



**Flair**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTES.....	2
PRO WRESTLING: 1983-1987.....	3
GREATEST MATCH OF THE OBSERVER YEARS by Jeff Bowdren.....	13
15 MOST INFLUENTIAL WRESTLERS OF PAST FIVE YEARS.....	15
THE BEST OF THE WRESTLING OBSERVER.....	27
Champions of 1983.....	27
The end of the first Tiger Mask.....	29
Champions of 1984.....	30
Value of the belt.....	31
20/20 Vision.....	32
The best of Mr. Mike's Mondo Wrestling.....	33
Riki Choshu's first jump.....	36
McMahon buys Georgia Wrestling.....	38
Mr. Mike's most famous cover.....	39
Ad for the first Starcade.....	40
Wrestling tombstones.....	40
LEADING NEWS STORIES OF 1987.....	41
MR. MIKE'S TOP STORIES OF 1987.....	50
MR. MIKE 1987 IN REVIEW.....	52
CHAMPIONS OF 1987.....	56
1987 WRESTLING OBSERVER RATINGS.....	62
1987 WRESTLING OBSERVER AWARDS.....	63
1987 PRO WRESTLING DIRECTORY.....	91
AND MORE ALIASES.....	97

Printed by: Inprint of Turlock, California

Cover and back cover production: Suzi Coen

Art work: Mr. Mike

Special thanks to: Everyone

The Best of the Wrestling Observer Volume 1: 1983-1987 is published by The Wrestling Observer Newsletter, P.O. Box 1228, Campbell, CA 95009-1228. This publication copyright (c) by Dave Meltzer, 1988.

The Wrestling Observer Newsletter is published weekly by the Wrestling Observer. Subscription rates are as follows:

\$5 for four issues  
\$10 for eight issues  
\$20 for 16 issues  
\$30 for 24 issues  
\$40 for 32 issues  
\$50 for 40 issues

Overseas subscriptions are available for \$9 for each set of four issues for air-mail delivery. Subscriptions can be sent to the Wrestling Observer Newsletter, P.O. Box 1228, Campbell, CA 95009-1228.

Additional copies of the Best of the Wrestling Observer can be purchased at the above address for \$12.50. All subscribers to the Wrestling Observer Newsletter receive an automatic discount and can purchase additional copies for \$10.

Back issues of the Wrestling Observer Newsletter will be available in 1988 (I promise this time). Details forthcoming.



# Wrestling Observer

Dave Meltzer, Editor

Post Office Box 1228, Campbell, CA 95009

About six weeks ago, as a couple of friends of mine and myself were leaving the arena in Nagoya, Japan, one of my Japanese friends stopped one of the sportswriters. They spoke a few words in Japanese, which I couldn't understand and my friend told him, "this is Dave Meltzer." The writer acted surprisingly impressed and said a few words. My friend translated, "He said, 'You are the World champion of sportswriters.'" For a brief moment my head swelled bigger than a certain wrestlers' belly. Then I wondered: When Slick Ric comes to Japan do they tell him he's the Dave Meltzer of wrestlers? Of course not. Back to Earth. But for that one moment. . .

## EDITORS' NOTES

There's really so much to say and so little space to say it in. This combination yearbook and best of issue has caused me to look back and see just how many people deserve credit for the success of the Observer. I can't even begin to thank everyone enough, and just hope that in a few more years we're all here to celebrate another anniversary.

It's very hard for me to write this column. I've got about 45 crumbled up pieces of paper on the floor, but deadline is 15 minutes away and this is the final shot. Simply, doing the Wrestling Observer has been the single most rewarding experience of my life. I want to thank all of you for the chance to be able to do it, and hope in some ways I've been able to inform, entertain, or infuriate you over these past few years.

My goal for the Wrestling Observer is simply to be an accurate portrayal of the pro wrestling business. I've said this before, but complete 100% accuracy is completely impossible here, no matter how many sources we get and how hard we try. Because of that, I have a standing position that if anything in the Observer isn't correct, please bring it to my attention and we'll do whatever is necessary to set the record straight.

The current format of 8-10 page weekly newsletters is actually about two years or so old. When the Observer started in 1983, it was a monthly 16 to 32 page newsmagazine format. We had a lot of different features back then. I write a regular column commenting on the issues of the day. Probably the most popular feature of the old Observers was Mr. Mike's column reviewing Twin Cities wrestling. Since probably 90% of you have never seen the old Observers, I wanted to reprint some of the best from the old style issues. And Mr. Mike is back with lots of new material here as well.

After five years, there are so many people to thank that I hate to single out just a few. But a few have to be. Ted Robinson of KCBS Radio, soon to be the television play-by-play voice of the Minnesota Twins is one, for all his help over the past year plus. Ed Garea was a great help in 1986 and I certainly can't fail to mention Susie Livingston, who kept me enthused about the publication on days I wasn't so enthused. Mr. Mike made the Wrestling Observer what it is. His contributions were the highlight of every issue. And all of you, who help my getting information, checking it out, sending in news and results, and everything else are the backbone of the Observer. Because of that, I'm dedicating this first "Best of" issue to Bill Wilson of Kansas City, who passed away this past year but was a long-time reader and contributor.

One more person who I've never mentioned in these pages of late but deserves mention, since so much of the current Observer format is taken from what he used to do, and that's Norm Dooley. His "Weasel's World" bulletin combined humor, match reports (as best as I can tell, he was the one who created the "star" rating system for matches) and inside info, and even had a few clever nicknames for the wrestlers.

We had more than 400 responses to our annual awards poll this year. Another record. And to finish it off, thanks to the wrestlers who have provided all of us with so much entertainment over the years. Wrestling is not an easy life and sometimes we can all get critical, but I don't want to lose sight of the fact that above all, wrestling is tremendous fun to watch. And that's the bottom line.

Sam Mel

PRO WRESTLING: 1983 - 1987

If there's one word, used often, that best describes pro wrestling over the past five years, the word is "Evolution."

The business has changed quite a bit both in the ring, in presentation and most of all, in its methods of promotion.

Probably the most changes have taken place because of two men, Vince McMahon, Jr. and Hulk Hogan. It's almost hard to separate them because the story of wrestling's so-called new popularity (originally a media creation which turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy) revolves around the changes McMahon made in the business and the charisma and popularity of his huge, blonde-haired World champion.

Going back not too many years, the pro wrestling world was divided into territories. At the peak of territories in the early 1970s, there were something like 32 different circuits, most of which were loosely affiliated with the St. Louis-based National Wrestling Alliance. The alliance members, basically an old-guard of promoters led by Sam Muchnick, may not have agreed on much on their territories were all run differently, some very well, some poorly, but they recognized two things, a World champion and territorial boundaries. When an "outlaw" promotion attempted to promote within a group's prescribed territories, the alliance promoters generally helped out by sending leading attractions to the promoter who was being invaded and in most cases, the competitor was put out of business.

Two of the most famous "outlaw" promoters of the 1970s were Ann Gunkel and Eddie Einhorn. Gunkel, in Atlanta, probably operated as successful an independent operation, called All South Wrestling in the early 1970s, as could be found, but ultimately the NWA pressure forced her out of business. Einhorn, the television mogul who some credit with making college basketball a national TV spectacular, tried to promote nationally in the mid-1970s with his International Wrestling Alliance, a group which many observers say would have been successful had not the old-guard worked together to not only send top-line talent to compete with his shows, but also kept him from booking most major arenas.

But as the decade of the 1980s began, the old guard was falling apart. Many of the regional offices, such as Roy Shire's in Northern California, Mike LeBelle's in Southern California, Nick Gulas (after a bitter war with Jerry Jarrett) in Tennessee and Leroy McGuirk in the Ozarks fell out of the picture, partially because they ran their territory poorly and partially because competition forced them out. Muchnick had already retired as NWA president by this time, although he was still a key member of the alliance until his retirement from wrestling promotion in 1982.

But even as some weak links fell out of the chain, when 1983 began, the regional style of promotion was flourishing. The biggest was Vince McMahon Sr.'s World Wrestling Federation, which operated mainly in the Northeast and could count on the biggest gates in the country in cities like New York, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. As the year went on, Senior, in failing health, began to turn more and more control over, and ultimately complete control, to his son, Vince Junior, who became the key figure in the wrestling world over the next several years.

Jim Crockett Jr. ran the Carolinas and Virginia. Even though most of the cities were small in size, many credited him with running the best wrestling operation in the country. Greensboro, for its size, was probably the wrestling hotbed of the United States and his talent pool, led by Ric Flair, Roddy Piper, Ricky Steamboat, Sgt. Slaughter, Jimmy Valiant, Wahoo McDaniel, Dory Funk, The Brisco brothers, Jay Youngblood, etc. was generally considered the best and deepest crew of workers in the United States. Two key events happened in 1983 for Crockett. The first was a brilliant build-up for a cage match in Greensboro sending Steamboat & Youngblood vs. Slaughter & Don Kernodle for the latter's NWA tag belts which resulted in a sold out Greensboro Coliseum, with literally 6,000 fans turned away. While Greensboro had sold out before, what the Crocketts realized was that this card was of interest to fans not only in the Greensboro area, but throughout the three-state region they promoted (Crockett also supplied talent for Frank Tunney's shows in the Toronto area). This show ultimately spawned Starcade '83, a monumental breakthrough in pro wrestling on Thanksgiving night, where more than 45,000 fans paid roughly \$650,000 in the three-state region for the live and closed-circuit show which was headlined by Flair regaining the NWA title from Harley Race in a cage match.

With the possible exception of the WWF, more wrestling fans knew of the Georgia office, run by Ole Anderson (who wound up in control after Jim Barnett was booted out of power), which had the advantage of being the first promotion on national cable, WTBS out of Atlanta. Anderson used WTBS to run many successful shows in the formerly desolate Ohio/Michigan/West Virginia area, which ultimately, in 1983, brought him into conflict with McMahon who wanted to promote those same areas. But the truth is that while Georgia was one of the hottest offices around in the early 1980s, promotional blunders, travel demands on the wrestlers and several other problems were already bringing the office to its knees and by 1983 it was doing poorly. Probably the most significant thing that happened to the fans that year was, with Matt Borne & Arn Anderson being groomed for the tag team title, Borne got into legal problems in Ohio and was fired. To replace them, Anderson brought in two huge bodybuilders trained by Eddie Sharkey,



the Road Warriors. While terribly green at the time, the two made an immediate impact (although not enough to save the dying promotion) and were responsible for a trend of the last five years to using heavily steroided monsters in the ring to a public which was largely buying the trend.

The AWA was apparently in the midst of the most successful period in the promotion's history. Although Verne Gagne probably didn't realize it at the time, much of the popularity was due to his leading draw, Hulk Hogan, who before the New York media found out about him, was easily the biggest drawing card the business had to offer. While many credit the movie Rocky III for Hogan's impact on wrestling, to do so would be ignoring the fact that Hogan's drawing power was felt immediately upon his AWA arrival in 1981--a full year before the Rocky movie was ever released. Equally forgotten in wrestling lore is that Gagne had originally brought Hogan in as a heel, managed by Johnny Valiant, but like the Road Warriors years later, the public wasn't buying this superhero as a villain and cheered him anyway.

1983 was also a successful year for World Class Wrestling, which rode the Von Erichs vs. Freebirds feud to new heights of success, selling out Reunion Arena for big holiday shows and drawing some incredible spot show gates just so the young fans could get a glimpse of the Von Erich kids, throughout Texas. The success of World Class, however, was taking its toll on Joe Blanchard's Southwest Championship Wrestling, which promoted in the same neck of the woods. Blanchard had his show on the USA network, and like Anderson, had visions of spreading nationally through his exposure. However, like Anderson, and unlike McMahon, who had the same dream, they neither had the promotional nor wrestling talent to even get out of the blocks.

Mid South Sports, run by "Cowboy" Bill Watts with shows in Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Southeastern Texas, was another highly successful regional office. While Mid South's peak was actually to come in 1984, it still had much gate success and was credited by many with having the best wrestling television program in North America. Also unique to Mid South was it was the only promotion in the country to go with a black wrestler, Sylvester Ritter, better known as Junkyard Dog, as its leading babyface attraction. The Dog literally had legendary status in Louisiana and the surrounding states and was probably one of the three or four biggest drawing cards in North America. In fact, the success of Mid South in Louisiana many felt, ultimately led to McGuirk's promotion, which ran Arkansas and Oklahoma, to be forced out of business when Watts' troupe invaded the area for live shows. At one point, Watts and Jack Adkisson (Fritz Von Erich) were at each other's heels in Oklahoma, but the two worked out a working agreement which at least at the beginning, served to benefit both parties.

Championship Wrestling from Florida, headed by Eddie Graham, was considered the model regional promotion in the United States during most of the 1970s. Until the rise of JCP behind Flair, CWF was generally considered as the best promotion both for quality of matches and talent, in the U.S. While Florida had fallen from its peak a few years earlier, it was still headquarters of Dusty Rhodes, who had been the business' premier drawing card at one point and certainly was still in the top three or four.

Another local legend was Jerry Lawler, Mr. Memphis at the time, who was Jerry Jarrett's leading drawing card. After Lawler and Lance Russell failed in an attempt to start their own promotion and the hard feelings were soothed about as well as they possibly could under the circumstances, this group had another profitable year in 1983, much of it due to the success of The Fabulous Ones, the first babyface MTV type tag team which set another precedent that went crazy for a few years, but seems at this point to have run its course. The Rock & Roll Express got started here, and the workers were some of the best and most unsung around, like Bobby Eaton, Terry Taylor, Jacques Rougeau and Ricky Morton. For years Jarrett, in the Kentucky area specifically, had been involved in a very nasty promotional war with Angelo Poffo, whose son Randy Savage, totally unheralded and virtually unknown to mainstream fans, was privately talked about as being possibly the most talented worker in the business. When things were finally settled, matches between Lawler and Savage drew record gates in many cities. Although Memphis itself peaked years earlier, the territory as a whole had never been stronger.

Another promotion with lots of unsung young talent was Stampede Wrestling, based in Calgary. Stampede was the only North American promotion to place lots of emphasis on mid-heavyweights, men of less than 200 pounds. Certainly the best worker on the circuit, and some said the best in the world at the time, was the Dynamite Kid but others, like Davey Boy Smith, Bret Hart, Badnews Allen, The Cobra, Ron Starr and David Shults all headlined a generally successful territory.

There were others as well, Montreal was drawing tremendous gates with Dino Bravo and Rick Martel as the leading draws; Continental was doing well in Alabama and Northwest Florida; and Don Owen ran a steady territory in Oregon and Washington which was having much success building around local rookie Billy Jack and his feud with Buddy Rose and Rip Oliver.

In Japan, things were even hotter. Antonio Inoki's New Japan promotion started the year as successfully as any promotion possibly could, selling out buildings more than 90 percent of the time behind Inoki's legendary popularity, plus a meteoric success of Riki Choshu and the idol of the little kids, Tiger

Mask (Satoru Sayama). Sayama's retirement during the summer shocked the wrestling public, and a coup-d-etat attempt by several of the younger wrestlers on Inoki was initially successful, but eventually ended in failure causing lots of bitter feelings, minor public outrage at the scandal, and brought the group down from its never-before-seen popularity.

As usual, Giant Baba's promotion in Japan was doing steady business relying on big foreign names like The Funk brothers, Bruiser Brody and Stan Hansen joining with his native stars. Terry Funk's "retirement" show in August drew one of the largest and most enthusiastic gates in the history of pro wrestling.

The Japanese women's group was building itself around The Crush Girls, two teenagers who specialized in karate skills but were still green in wrestling tactics, and their quest to do in much larger and more skilled foes. The two were just beginning to become heroes to the Japanese teenage girls and two years later, behind the Crush Girls, this promotion reached heights nobody ever believed women's wrestling could.

That was then and this is now. Yes, in 1983, wrestling's future looked bright, and in a sense, what happened in some ways far exceeded even the wildest imagination of most of the promoters, and in a sense, things are worse off than ever.

#### THE WAR OF '84

While the National Wrestling Alliance had a monopoly pretty well on the business for more than two decades, as pointed out before, promotional conflicts weren't rare either. And don't think that a promoter, enjoying a strong run in his territory, didn't think of trying to expand his boundaries or even promote nationally.

The AWA had already spread West to San Francisco, putting the final bolts on the corpse of the once-strong Roy Shires' office. After LeBelle burned Los Angeles to the ground, the WWF tried to rebuild interest on the other side of the country from the ashes. Ole Anderson's Georgia Championship Wrestling had spread to Michigan and Ohio, and Joe Blanchard and Anderson both were on television threatening to bring their promotions into what had been other offices' "territories." But those were all minor waves compared to the tidal wave and earthquake to come.

The war started slowly, in fact it had begun before most of its participants were even aware of it. As the WWF and Anderson's promotion were battling over Ohio, mysteriously, one by one, several of Anderson's leading stars were disappearing into "a black hole." The key ones were Paul Orndorff and The Masked Superstar, but four or five others fit the bill as well. They were on top with Anderson, then suddenly, for months, their names disappeared except for tours of Japan with Antonio Inoki (at the time a McMahon ally). While on a tour in the fall of 1983, the word leaked out, McMahon, Sr. had signed all these guys away from Anderson, but nobody could figure out why, since they weren't even appearing in the WWF territory.

A few other events happened. In St. Louis, McMahon Jr. started negotiating to buy the television time on KPLR-TV, a station which carried Muchnick's show for years, and now carried Muchnick's successors, the St. Louis Wrestling Club (Harley Race, Verne Gagne, Bob Geigel and Pat O'Connor). Rumors of this leaked out, at which time McMahon, Sr. pacified his soon-to-be-rivals saying that they would never do anything like that. The early stages of the war were like that, Junior would do something which scared and infuriated the other promotions and made them think something was up, while Senior would pacify their fears saying they were just being overly paranoid.

Even when the WWF obtained the USA network slot from Blanchard's group in late 1983, it didn't cause much concern. For one thing, many were relieved that Blanchard's threats to run nationally had been seemingly quelled on a permanent basis. They also knew that USA was unhappy with Blanchard's show, both the content (heavy juice was used which the network didn't like; plus they were appalled at an angle involving Bobby Jagers and Scott Casey in which one dumped pig dung on the other) and the fact Blanchard was often late in paying the \$3,000 per week the slot cost. McMahon agreed to put on a more acceptable product, and also according to USA sources, took over Blanchard's debt, and All-American Wrestling was off and running.

Some of you may recall the original episodes of All-American Wrestling. It was actually like today's Pro Wrestling this Week, in that it had clips from several of the major promotions. McMahon knew the wrestlers he was after, Barry Windham, Mike Rotundo, Junkyard Dog, Hulk Hogan, Roddy Piper, Ric Flair and the Von Erichs and featured and pushed them along with pushing his own stable, at the time led by Bob Backlund, Andre the Giant and Jimmy Snuka. The promotions thought McMahon was doing them a favor, putting their guys on national television, and even supplied him with the tapes to do so.

Whatever was thought in November changed rapidly as the wrestling world was shocked on December 27, 1983. Just one day earlier, with no hints whatsoever, Bob Backlund dropped the WWF title he had held for nearly six years to the Iron Sheik. That day McMahon ran his first incarnation of the "Superstars of Wrestling" tape, from the Chase Hotel in St. Louis before a turnaway crowd of more than 1,000. Hulk Hogan was there, primed and ready to win the WWF



title in less than four weeks. Gene Okerlund, the Twin Cities cult hero type voice of the AWA was there, handling interviews. Roddy Piper was there, as a heel manager at first, not a wrestler, as was David Shults. Dozens of more defections were to follow, but most woke up to the fact that McMahon had invaded "somebody else's" city--St. Louis--and produced a tape using "somebody else's" main stars, Hogan, Piper, Gene and Shults.

McMahon purchased the St. Louis TV time for a cool \$2,100 per week plus a percentage of the live gate went to the station as well. With a vindictive Jim Barnett, ready to get back at Anderson, as his TV adviser, McMahon followed by purchasing TV time in as many major markets as he could, with the specific intention in most of the markets to get the existing TV time that the local promotion had--in other words, not only was it his goal to get himself on the tube, but to knock the opposition off television, hence, out of the market.

Probably the most controversial thing McMahon did was add another show to his growing list of shows on USA--called TNT, originally short for Tuesday Night Titans. This was a talk show with wrestlers, with McMahon playing Johnny Carson and Lord Al Hayes playing Ed McMahon. Some of the shows were brilliant, although most were something a lot less than that. What TNT did was openly admit to the public that pro wrestling was a joke, something the majority of the public already believed but something that those in wrestling staunchly loathed. Although it wasn't obvious at the time, apparently TNT was designed specifically to show one specific network executive, NBC's Dick Ebersole, that pro wrestling in its comedy and most bizarre form, would work on the network. Obviously this was successful and by mid-1985, Saturday Night's Main Event came to fruition and McMahon had established his version of wrestling as major league entertainment.

TNT, which debuted in late May, just days after Senior finally succumbed to cancer, predated the famous Cyndi Lauper angle by a few weeks. Lauper, then one of the hottest musical performers in the nation, was also good friends with Lou Albano, then McMahon's leading heel manager. The two worked up an angle where they would feud, then Lauper would manage Wendi Richter and Albano manage Fabulous Moolah, the women's world champion for the previous half-century, in a match at Madison Square Garden.

The media was beginning to label McMahon a genius, as the person who brought pro wrestling back from the dead, and labeling TNT as the biggest success on cable television. Most of this publicity was a result of lies and misrepresentations, because at the time there was no evidence McMahon had done anything to increase popularity, although certainly there was a new group of fans aware and intrigued by this strange business.

Most of the popularity increases claimed were things that took place in 1983 when wrestling had dozens of territories independently thriving at the same time. While TNT was one of the highest rated shows on cable, it alternated bi-weekly with Titan house show matches, and the matches themselves drew better ratings than TNT. So it wasn't so much TNT was a success as the fact wrestling was (and still is) the hottest thing on cable and TNT didn't offend enough wrestling fans (at least in its inception) for ratings to fall more than slightly. In fact, at the time, the highest rated wrestling TV show--and the highest rated program of any kind on cable--had been, for several years, Anderson's WTBS show on Saturday nights. But McMahon was just about ready to take care of that.

While most in the business were asleep at the wheel, McMahon began buying the stock of Georgia Championship Wrestling, Inc. from several minor share holders. Then he approached the Brisco brothers, who were already disenchanted with the way Anderson had run down the GCW business, which continued to fall off rapidly in the early months of '84. By May the deal was set. McMahon bought controlling interest in the company, Anderson filed an injunction preventing the take-over and save the TBS slot, which ultimately failed and in June, McMahon had a monopoly on the wrestling on cable television.

What wasn't expected was the flood of complaints to WTBS when the WWF, which folded the Georgia circuit itself immediately after purchasing it, took over. The complains were so many in number and so vehement that Ted Turner quickly gave Anderson another lease on life, an early morning time slot on WTBS, not watched by many, but by enough to keep them in the game, and Anderson, with help from the Crocketts, formed a new company, Championship Wrestling from Georgia, Inc.

At about the same time, the Moolah-Richter match with Lauper and Albano involved took place at the Garden. While few remember the live crowd for this card (which also included a Hulk Hogan title match, plus a Battle Royal was added to the card just days before in hopes of making it look good for cameras) was 15,000--not bad by today's standards but embarrassing to McMahon who had been selling the Garden out routinely before then. Still, the MTV special, which ended with Richter cornoated new queen of wrestling, was a ratings success even if the match itself ranked among the worst of all-time, complete with a messed up finish.

McMahon started invading new cities with his live shows. In some places, like California, he had enormous success. In many areas where the local promotion was still strong, he met with initial failure. All the while McMahon continued to gobble up name talent--The Freebirds (who lasted a very short time), Barry Windham, Mike Rotundo, Billy Jack (who set a record by lasting

three days), Greg Valentine, Bob Orton, Jesse Ventura and Junkyard Dog all migrated North.

While McMahon's balance sheets were heavy in the red ink with all the talent on payroll, bills for television stations, and arena shows which weren't drawing, his opposition, instead of capitalizing on McMahon's weakness, got together and laughed figuring he'd soon spend himself out, and almost encouraged him to spend big dollars and strip them of talent, without making any reasonable counter offers.

It was a mistake most of them would live to regret.

1984 was at best a moderate year for JCP. Flair was still a touring World champion, but he frequently headlined shows here and drew reasonably well as a babyface. All the departures for Titan did hurt business, but JCP countered by bringing in the knight in shining cellulite, Dusty Rhodes, as booker. In all due respect for Rhodes, it must be pointed out that before 1987, he did a great job with the book. As all the other promotions were quickly swirling down the commode, Dusty transformed JCP at one time into a very viable national group, where they probably still would be had not the last six months had taken place.

Even without Hogan, the AWA remained a success. With the Georgia promotion folding, the Road Warriors returned home in the late summer and with them also came Bruiser Brody, The Fabulous Ones, Abdullah the Butcher and others. While they didn't make up for the loss of Hogan, the newcomers, plus the return of some oldies like The Crusher and Blackjack Lanza, made for some healthy gates in the winter months. On the championship front, long-time champion Nick Bockwinkel dropped the strap in Japan to Jumbo Tsuruta. Tsuruta toured the U.S. two times before losing to Rick Martel. Martel, while a great athlete, good looking, well conditioned and one of the best tag team wrestlers around, never really got his style in synch with what the fans wanted until just months before dropping the strap more than a year later. In truth, Martel was doomed from the start by a promotion which had no idea how to take advantage of his good points, and his reign emphasized Martel's weakness in interviews and charisma, made worse by endless matches the fans didn't want to see against the likes of Bob Backlund, Brad Rheingans and Billy Robinson.

Texas was struck was tragedy early in the year. David Von Erich, perhaps an heir apparent to the NWA title, and thought of by most as the best worker of the three wrestling Von Erich brothers, died in early February before starting a tour of Japan. Although the families explanation of the death was filled with holes, suffice to say the real reason never came out publicly and David died a hero to the wrestling fans. Although crowds had fallen from the groups' peak just a little, World Class was still a hot territory. Its biggest success came on May 6, when Kerry Von Erich defeated Flair for the NWA title before 32,123 fans and a \$402,000 gate at Texas Stadium. At the time, the gate was the third largest (trailing only Starcade and a 1980 Bruno Sammartino vs. Larry Zbyszko match at Shea Stadium which drew \$541,730) in the history of the business. While it wasn't the final hurrah for World Class, the group was never able to equal that showing.

May was a wild month. Not only were wrestlers jumping to Titan, Senior dying, TNT and Lauper starting out, Junior on the verge of buying the Georgia office, and Flair temporarily losing the strap (he regained it on May 24 from Kerry in Yokosuka, Japan), but Crockett and Anderson were combining with Carlos Colon to promote a show in the Meadowlands near New York.

The card was on May 29, with the only promotion on a small UHF spanish station. In hindsight, the crowd of more than 12,000 (\$127,900) should have been a success, but the NWA forces had been telling each other how easily they would sellout New York that the crowd for Flair's victory over Steamboat, was a disappointment. A subsequent card was advertised for August, but never took place, and it was a year before McMahon had opposition in his biggest city.

Baltimore turned out to be the first hardcore McMahon city to get regular shows. The first cards, which included Anderson, Crockett and Gagne wrestlers, drew moderately well. At one point, when the heaviest concentration was on the Gagne crew, they nearly were wiped out, but saved themselves by aligning with Crockett and to this day, Baltimore has turned into a city which supports the NWA better than the WWF.

Watts' Mid South was on such a hot streak in '84 that even the loss of Junkyard Dog to McMahon couldn't stop their momentum. Much of the success can be attributed to The Rock & Roll Express who came in during the early part of the year and crowds of teenage girls flooded buildings everywhere. Jim Cornette's original value as a manager was apparent as well as the creative booking of Bill Dundee, while others, like Jim Duggan, Terry Taylor and Butch Reed combined with occasional forays by World Class stars and Flair boosted TV ratings and live gates to the point where nobody was missing the Dog.

As the year was ending, McMahon had the support of the media and had put together an impressive television syndicated package (which was still costing him money to keep together). His live shows were a mixed bag of successes and failures, and his payroll probably as large as any in the business' history. He was bailed out of a cash flow problem by a quick import of yen. He was on the verge of some gigantic things--the biggest show in history and the return of wrestling to network television. But even McMahon, and certainly his closest



confidants, were worried about where they would end up when the walls came tumbling down. While there was a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow in sight, there were some nasty accidents blocking traffic down the road.

For one, plain and simple, the business was losing money. While Hogan was certainly better at the box office due to his charisma than Backlund, his predictable style and short matches were not a long-term success. While it's hard to believe now, but the Hulkster was having problems drawing, particularly when he would appear in the same city frequently. Piper was doing a good job in the lead heel role, but his refusal to do jobs, plus the fact he was much smaller physically than Hogan, made them avoid the obvious match-up. Sgt. Slaughter, whose drawing power had already decreased but had become the cult-hero of the media even moreso than Hogan, was trying to unionize the grapplers. And the opposition had banded together to form Pro Wrestling USA doing tapings with stars from the major groups and were once again set for an offensive throughout the Northeast. And Ted Turner was complaining long and loud that the WTBS show wasn't coming from his studios, as his contract with GCW stated, and was duplication of the product on USA, and ratings were falling because of it. In fact, Turner had already negotiated a deal with Watts for 1985 to give Watts a Sunday time slot, with the promise it would develop into the entire TBS package once he could rid himself of McMahon--and Turner and Watts would join together and promote nationally.

McMahon had one big angle up his sleeve. On the late December card at the Garden, Albano, who turned babyface and now siding with Lauper, along with Lauper, were being presented a plaque for their contributions to wrestling. Piper, still the ultimate heel, broke the gold record over Albano's head, then kicked Lauper who tried to attack him--all taped for MTV with the promise of a build-up of a Hogan vs. Piper match, to be carried live on MTV, in February.

#### THE BATTLE TO SURVIVE '85

McMahon had already taken a calculated gamble as the year came to a close by firing Slaughter, who immediately became the focal point of the opposition's Pro Wrestling USA group. In truth, while Slaughter was still a big name in the media and gave the opposition some credibility, his drawing power had already declined significantly from its mid-summer peak (when it was arguably ahead of either Hogan or Piper). Slaughter's abortive feud with Russian menace Nikolai Volkoff wasn't drawing, and having the opposition build everything around Slaughter, which they did, could, and did work to McMahon's advantage.

But the media continued to take notice of wrestling's genius, crediting him for the cable TV ratings (which were still impressive, but they had been even larger dating back to wrestling first becoming the only WTBS show to get a national rating seven years earlier); the success of TNT (which had been moved to Friday's and was in truth, no longer getting much of an audience) and the MTV tie-in.

McMahon's real success can be traced to the Hogan vs. Piper MTV special. It was 55 minutes of farce, a main event of less than five minutes, and involved Lauper and Mr. T in the outcome. It was also the biggest audience ever to watch anything on MTV in its history. But while the MTV folks thought they were getting the climax of the feud, in reality, they just got the build-up. The stage was set for Wrestlemania.

It was certainly the most ambitious undertaking in wrestling history. While Crockett had success with his Starcade cards on closed-circuit, they were beamed to less than 20 locations. McMahon booked more than 200 buildings for March 31, 1985 as Hogan (who thought MTV and his connections with Lauper and Mr. T has turned into a national celebrity) and T (at the peak of his popularity with a hit TV series "The A Team") joined forces to battle Piper (who also was turning into a celebrity from all this with his quick-witted and hair-brained interviews) and Paul Orndorff (somebody has to do the job). This all happened so quick the opposition was at a loss of what to do.

Some folks in wrestling were livid that T would be put in a ring. Some hated the business being exposed to outsiders (T and David Wolfe) who may some day go on Carson and joke about how the whole thing is worked. Some thought it would somehow hurt wrestling if T were to pin an established main eventer, being that he was a lot smaller and a TV actor, not an athlete, although that didn't take into account the public delusion that T was a legit tough guy and it was the wrestlers who were the phonies. Secret plans were worked up, but never followed through. One McMahon wrestler, David Shults, even went after T in Los Angeles, although it's unclear whether he truly wanted to prove to the public that wrestlers were tougher than actors, or simply was trying to work an angle himself where he, not Orndorff, would get to be Piper's partners and share in the big payoff. Either way, it was unsuccessful and the incident cost Shults his job.

ABC's 20/20 then did a big wrestling expose just prior to the card and at the heat of the hype. Although Eddy Mansfield exposed many of wrestling's secrets, particularly blading, to a network audience, the end result was more curiosity toward wrestling, more media visibility, and ultimately, more fans. Although Mansfield was the big star of the piece, it was Shults, who slapped investigative reporter John Stossel (ironically this was in the dressing room the night of the Lauper/Piper/Albano incident) who made the biggest impression. In truth, Stossel, a former amateur wrestler, was so infuriated by Shults'

his replacement as the year came to a close.

While World Class wasn't the hot item it had been the two previous years, a double hair match in which Kevin & Kerry downed Gino Hernandez & Chris Adams still managed to draw 26,000 fans to the Cotton Bowl and the year-end shows at Reunion Arena drew in excess of 10,000.

The AWA promoted Superclash in Chicago's White Sox Park in September and drew a gate in excess of \$280,000 combining the best of the NWA and AWA talent with Kerry Von Erich brought in from World Class to boot. However the AWA's glory days were behind as were World Class and even Mid South. By the time the year was out, it was inevitable this business would turn into a two horse race--McMahon and Crockett--and McMahon had already rounded the clubhouse turn.

Rhodes made a risky decision that to this day is still second-guessed, although nobody can argue it wasn't successful in the short term. He made Flair, who had been in the half-heel and half-face position, into a full-fledged hardcore heel after a September angle in which Flair turned on Dusty in a cage with help from Ole & Arn Anderson. This set up the main event at Starcade '85, "The Gathering," with live matches in both Greensboro and now in Atlanta along with several closed-circuit sites. It was the biggest Starcade to date, grossing \$936,000 and the smaller promotions immediately tried harder to work with Crockett and share some of the gravy of the hot Flair/Rhodes issue. While this gate wasn't in the same league with Wrestlemania, in many ways, considering the expense and lack of media hype, Crockett's show was every bit as successful. And shortly after Thanksgiving the Road Warriors came in virtually for full-time work, clearly Crockett was ready to fly in '86.

By the end of the year, the Stampede Wrestling territory was re-opened. McMahon actually bought out Stu Hart in late '84, when Hart, then 69, decided at his age he'd rather cooperate with the monsters from New York than try and compete. As part of the deal, McMahon acquired three wrestlers who were to be among his biggest stars down the line, Bret Hart, Dynamite Kid and Davey Boy Smith, the latter two were given the monicker the British Bulldogs in '85 while Hart wound up teaming with brother-in-law Jim Neidhart to form the Hart Foundation, both squads eventually held McMahon's tag team title. But Hart re-opened, partially because there were a lot of wrestlers in the area who would work for him and partially because Titan was looking for a place to train its future wrestlers, although Stampede has turned into more than that now.

Jarrett Promotions were probably responsible for bringing celebrities into the business from Lawler's 1982-83 feud with Andy Kaufman, the now deceased actor who was a co-star in "Taxi," a popular sit-com of that era. Business was down in 84-85, although it still remained one of the better run smaller promotions. Its television show on WMC-TV, the NBC affiliate in Memphis, was still one of the highest rated TV shows in the market and one of the highest rated locally produced shows of any kind in the nation.

Over in Japan, just as Inoki recovered from one massacre, another even bigger one bit him. As mentioned, Inoki's promotion was easily the hottest in the world in 1982, showing a profit that year of something like \$10 million and playing to full houses almost every night, and garnering impressive TV ratings. Although Giant Baba's group was doing steady business, and the addition of Stan Hansen (who joined the group in 1982) boomed business with new feuds, even Baba's most stalwart supporters admitted they were getting their ass kicked.

There were several reasons Inoki's success was squandered. During the boom, most of the wrestlers assumed, or at least were brainwashed into believing that it was Inoki who was drawing the crowds. Some may not have believed it and many of the foreigners who worked for Inoki were bitter over the assumption. In June of 1983 Inoki was injured in a match by Hogan and had to spend several months on the sidelines. While that was going on, New Japan sold out almost every night. The younger wrestlers suddenly realized they, not Inoki, were drawing the crowds which led to the coup-d'etat.

When the coup failed there were two casualties. The first was Hisashi Shinma, as it came out he was embezzling several wrestlers salaries to help finance outside business interests, including an Inoki business in Brazil which was flopping miserably. Shinma was the booker for New Japan who created the boom, pushing the junior heavyweights, giving Riki Choshu the chance at stardom and putting Sayama in the Tiger Mask outfit. The other was Sayama himself, a leader in the coup, who retired from wrestling rather than face the punishment that was inevitable, and eventually exposing the business to the media in several books.

Shinma, who doubled as the WWF figurehead president (the position Jack Tunney now holds), was bitter about his ouster and created his own promotion, the Universal Wrestling Federation. Akira Maeda, Inoki's No. 3 babyface behind himself and Tatsumi Fujinami, who was originally discovered by Shinma while competing in a karate tournament, was Shinma's original main star. Eventually Karl Gotch, a legendary name in wrestling, who trained Maeda in Florida, got involved and Yoshiaki Fujiwara, a veteran who up until '84 was a prelim jobber but got a big push in '84 after attacking Choshu with a tire iron at a time when rumors were flying everywhere that Choshu was going to leave New Japan for the WWF and Titan would promote in Japan, and the potentially awesome Nobuhiko Takada followed.

Shinma's group ran for a few months in 1984 with moderate success. One show in Tokyo drew more than 9,000 fans--impressive for a group without television.



attack that it was in his mind to destroy pro wrestling with his piece. By doing so, he concentrated on the laughable real vs. fake issue which most of the public already knew the answer to and steered away from the side of the business which could have done real damage.

A few weeks later, Hogan and T were spreading good will on the talk show circuit. Hogan put comedian Richard Belzer out with a front facelock which later resulted in a multi-million dollar lawsuit. T made a nuisance of himself on David Letterman's show. Both co-hosted Saturday Night Live the day before the big event.

Wrestlemania, at least a few weeks in, hardly looked like the success it turned out to be. With two weeks to go, most locations weren't selling any tickets. Titan was running around trying to cut its losses and cancelling nearly half the sites. Even with a week to go, things looked bleak but the last week hype job, plus the fact that closed-circuit audiences as we've now learned, traditionally buy walk-up tickets and not in advance, more than saved the day. The show was a success, grossing in excess of \$4 million, a figure wrestling had never even approached before.

A few weeks before that the pressure from Turner became too much for McMahon, who sold the time slot to Crockett, reportedly for \$1 million (reportedly it cost him \$650,000 to get it). Wrestling folklore has it that McMahon's last comment to Crockett before the ink was even dry on the check was, "You'll choke on that million." Whether it's true or not, McMahon was outdistancing his rivals.

Now everyone, even Newsweek and Sports Illustrated (which put Hulk Hogan on its cover and had its second best selling issue of the year) was writing about wrestling become a booming business, which in a sense it had. McMahon's licensing efforts, creating a TV Saturday morning cartoon on CBS, spawning dolls, lunch boxes, pajamas and other kids goodies, came to fruition. NBC put McMahon's wrestlers on TV two months later and Titan Sports was a success story.

While Titan's guys got all the glory, JCP was making a turn-around. With national exposure, Crockett set his sites of becoming a poor man's McMahon and was initially quite successful. The deal to exchange talent with Jarrett and Anderson fell through, in fact Anderson's second promotion went belly-up at this point, with Crockett absorbing several of the wrestlers. Jerry Lawler's promised World title win over Flair was canceled, and Crockett tried to take a new twist on McMahon's role.

McMahon, of course, wouldn't allow the opposition to use any of his wrestlers. Crockett would, but only if the promotion were allow him in as co-promoter. The days of the NWA champion (Flair) traveling around the globe to different circuits were rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Flair's final appearance for World Class was during its second annual Texas Stadium show, which drew 26,000 fans. Flair's match with Nikita Koloff in Charlotte drew 27,000 in July. At this time Flair wasn't technically a babyface or a heel, as he feuded with everyone, but was certainly the No. 2 drawing card behind Hogan during the summer (Piper took summer off as his wife was expecting and coming off Wrestlemania, he also had the leverage to negotiate a better deal for himself). With Flair the hottest non-Titan commodity, Crockett began insisting that to get Flair, you have to bring in several Crockett guys and make Crockett co-promoter of the show. While these big combined shows drew well, ultimately they hurt the territories they went into because fans in Florida or Tennessee or Oregon stayed away from the buildings when the locals were on the show, waiting instead for the big combined cards (in which case the NWA guys were billed as "the stars").

Mid South, looking at becoming a major force on WTBS, struggled early. Crockett's new deal wound up with Mid South losing its WTBS slot, and then Crockett, checkbook in hand, signed Terry Taylor and the Rock & Roll Express, then beat Mid South (which was planning on bringing back the Midnight Express & Jim Cornette, a key factor in their success the previous year) to the punch and brought in Cornette, acknowledged by most as the premier manager in the game.

A lot of people have taken credit for turning the Carolinas back around while everyone else was faltering. Certainly Rhodes as booker deserves credit, but when crowds of 4,000 became 7,000 and the extra few thousand was teenagers, particularly girls, it became obvious that it was the Rock & Roll Express. Morton & Gibson's final few months in Mid South didn't draw well, and the lesson was already established, but not learned by Dusty--these teen idols, as in any other business with teen idols--are hot for two years, but after that, as you've got to develop new teen idols or you'll lose your audience. Ultimately, the inability to develop, or better, allow develop, new main eveters, is what caused Crockett's collapse two years later.

The decline of the AWA was noticeable and prominent. Sgt. Slaughter worked out perfectly in Titan's eyes. They tried to build everything around a gimmick which was only a short-term gimmick and the short-term had ended a long time ago. While fans went crazy over the Road Warriors, their style destroyed all opposition and therefore the Roadies had impact, but their matches themselves didn't, and they couldn't draw except for the short term and ultimately led to the near-death of the promotion. McMahon came into every city Verne was in and by the end of the year, was beating him on all fronts. Ultimately, Slaughter left, the Roadies left for Crockett and Martel even left, with Stan Hansen as

However, without foreign stars, the group appeared doomed to failure. Then came Sayama, the exiled legend. Coming back first as "The Tiger" and later, "Super Tiger" the storybook hero brought respectability to the group. However, Sayama's backers wanted Shinma out, a power struggle ensued, and Shinma was exiled from the group he started. The young Japanese wrestlers, Sayama, Maeda, Takada, Kazuo Yamazaki (a student of Sayama's) along with Fujiwara then tried to legitimize their sport, saying it wasn't pro wrestling, but professional shooting. This infuriated those within the wrestling business, but also made them cult heroes and gave the group great popularity within Tokyo, even without television.

Still, the losses really didn't hurt New Japan, which was slowly recovering from the public loss of confidence in Sayama's disclosures about Inoki's business practices. Then the bomb dropped, so to speak.

The famed Ishingun (Choshu's army) vs. Seikigun (Inoki's group) feud which dominated main events so successfully for two years had just about run its course. New booker Sakaguchi figured that since Choshu's popularity had continued at an unbelievable level, he should be turned babyface and team with Inoki and Fujinami. It was arranged originally in '84 that Choshu and Yoshiaki Yatsu would first tour the WWF, win the tag belts for a while, then come home as conquering heroes. Just before this was to take place, Choshu, Yatsu, Animal Hamaguchi, Masa Saito and about a dozen others jumped from New Japan to All Japan. At one point there was serious question whether Inoki would stay in business, but like a cat with nine lives, Inoki always makes a comeback.

Choshu's jump boomed Baba's business in '85, and also increased the work rate. Many of the All Japan guys, used to a slower style, had to get it in gear with the younger and faster-paced Choshu-led warriors. Inoki managed to gain a measure of revenge signing Brody from Baba, and the Inoki-Brody matches did much to restore the fans' faith in Inoki as the best wrestler in Japan.

Still, the Inoki-Brody relationship was stormy on its good days, and something less than that most of the time. The UWF was plagued with one problem after another. Its president was arrested and sent to jail, it never got off the ground as far as television coverage and slowly, Sayama and the rest got into a rift as to what style of work should be done. It all climaxed in a Tokyo match between Sayama and Maeda, which from all accounts, really turned into a shoot. Sayama, seeing that Maeda was not only out to win, but to actually hurt him, grabbed his crotch and faked that Maeda had kicked him low. The ref had no choice but to disqualify Maeda--and remember, disqualifications weren't supposed to occur in UWF matches. Sayama never wrestled again. The UWF ran only a few more cards before going out of business. And at the end of 1985, all the UWF wrestlers, save for Sayama, signed to work for Inoki.

#### 1986: CROCKETT GOES NATIONAL

The Flair vs. Rhodes feud was going like gangbusters at the gate, even if many fans didn't like the idea of Flair's turn and openly booed Rhodes. The combination of that, and the first few trips of the Road Warriors against Ivan & Nikita Koloff proved to be a winning combination for JCP. There were others as well, like Magnum T.A. and the Rock & Roll that drew a big following.

McMahon was still in the lead to be sure, but the gap was closing. Wrestlemania II was not the success the first one was, although the expanded pay-per-view markets gave hope that a third try would be a huge success. Crockett had his share of failures also. A summer Bash tour, with large football stadiums booked with both wrestling and country music concerts turned out to be a flop in most places because Crockett and Rhodes had totally overestimated both the popularity of their own product and the popularity of country music.

The AWA's final success, although expenses were so high it may not have even been all that profitable, was "Wrestlerock," at the Metrodome in Bloomington, MN in April, just weeks after Wrestlemania. The Big show drew 16,000 fans and \$300,000, but in truth, the AWA was worse off in its aftermath. About the only highlight of '86 in the AWA was the feud between the Midnight Rockers and Buddy Rose & Doug Somers. The matches, by and large, were great, although with McMahon coming to almost every city they were in, the crowds were non-existent.

Crowds for World Class were already plummeting, and a motorcycle accident in June which kept Kerry Von Erich out the remainder of the year, turned them into definite minor league operation.

The company had been previously rocked with another tragedy in February, when Gino Hernandez, 29, its top heel, died of a cocaine overdose.

But certainly the most sympathy of '86 came when Magnum T.A., then the No. 2 babyface in the NWA behind Rhodes, nearly died in an auto accident. Magnum suffered destroyed vertebrae in his neck, and while he has since made a remarkable recovery and is occasionally seen on television, his accident was the biggest news story of the year.

McMahon's biggest coup of '86 was turning long-time babyface Orndorff back to heel, and shortly thereafter turning Piper to babyface. Hogan's matches with Orndorff were the most successful series in Titan's history and ended a long slump after Wrestlemania II. They sold out nearly every building they were booked in the first time, and drew good houses for follow-ups as well. The biggest crowd was in Toronto where nearly 70,000 fans packed Exhibition Stadium and paid \$1.2 million Canadian, both all-time live event



records.

JCP recovered from its overambitious summer plans, got back to Earth and drew \$980,000 or so at Starcade. The Bunkhouse Stampede tour which followed was also a success. At the same time, Crockett had taken over the failing Central States circuit, exported his prelim wrestlers to the area, but wasn't ever able to make a go of it.

Now Titan was clearly No. 1, and an untouchable No. 1 at that, but JCP was having a good deal of success on a nationwide basis, and reaching the audience that Titan's "fast-food" wrestling was missing.

Watts tried to make it a three-party race. First off, he hired Ken Mantell, the long-time World Class booker, and Mantell brought with him many of the World Class stars, most notably The Freebirds. Jim Ross was assigned the job of expanding the syndicated network nationally, and soon thereafter, Mid South Wrestling became the Universal Wrestling Federation.

The UWF and Crockett worked together in April for one of the most talked about cards ever, the Crockett Cup tag team tournament. In all, wrestlers from eight promotions converged on New Orleans for the event, won by the Road Warriors. The event was much publicized in wrestling circles, but was a disappointment overall as the combined gate of the two sessions was less than \$180,000. Watts and Crockett worked together for a few more shows before the year was out, but even then it was evident they were going their own way.

We all know how that turned out, and as we enter 1988, pro wrestling is, as Titan had been claiming for years and it was finally true, Titan, and a cloud of dust. The UWF is no more. World Class has new hope with Ken Mantell in charge, but judging from his early weeks in office, it has no chance to make it on a national basis. With the exception of its champion, Curt Hennig, the AWA is pretty well without any superstar talent. Oregon made a comeback behind booker Len Denton, but it's still strictly a small regional outfit. Somehow Central States is still in the hunt after all these years, but mainly with talent nobody else would ever want. A few independents are springing up in the South, but it's too soon to judge whether they've got what it takes although Jerry Blackwell's group has got an impressive stable for a small-region outfit. Continental is going to split in two next year. Stampede, which probably has the best actual wrestling in North America, is as hot as it has been since it restarted, and boasts of the most talented newcomer of recent years in Owen Hart. Jarrett's office is still alive, although its glory days appear to have been well in the past. McMahon finally finished off the opposition in Montreal. Florida was about to close up, got a new lease on life from Crockett and Dusty, but ultimately didn't make it. And even Crockett himself, after all the handwriting on the wall wasn't reacted to, fell from the top rung of the latter. Where he'll wind up will be the story of 1988, and if pro wrestling will have only one major league promotion when the dust clears.

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#### PRO WRESTLING'S BIGGEST GROSS GATES OF 1987

1) WRESTLEMANIA III: Pontiac Silverdome (\$1.6 million live gate), 166 closed circuit arenas (\$5.2 million) and pay-per-view nationally (\$10.3 million) on March 29. Headline matches were Andre the Giant vs. Hulk Hogan for the latter's WWF championship, Roddy Piper vs. Adrian Adonis in a hair vs. hair match and Randy Savage vs. Ricky Steamboat for the Intercontinental title

2) SURVIVORS SERIES: Richfield Coliseum (well over \$200,000) and pay-per-view nationally (estimated at \$7.8 million, although likely well under that figure) on November 26. Headlining the show were a series of elimination tag team matches

3) STARCADA '87 - CHITOWN HEAT: University of Illinois Pavilion in Chicago (\$180,000 live gate), 40 closed circuit arenas (\$820,000) and some pay-per-view (\$300,000) on November 26. Headline matches were Ron Garvin defending the NWA title against Ric Flair, Lex Luger defending the U.S. title against Dusty Rhodes and Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson defending the NWA tag title against The Road Warriors

4) INOKI LIVE II: Osaka Castle Auditorium (\$700,000 live gate). Headline matches were Antonio Inoki vs. Masa Saito and Akira Maeda & Nobuhiko Takada vs. Keiji Muto & Shiro Koshinaka plus a series of matches involving martial arts fighters on March 26

5) SUMMER NIGHT FEVER IN KOKUGIAN: Tokyo Sumo Hall (\$443,000 live gate) on April 20. Headline events were the finals of the IWGP jr. heavyweight tournament with Nobuhiko Takada vs. Kuniaki Kobayashi and a tag match with Riki Choshu & Tatsumi Fujinami vs. Antonio Inoki & Keiji Muto

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#### BIGGEST LIVE CROWDS OF 1987

1) 90,817 at Pontiac Silverdome for Wrestlemania III on March 29

2) 21,300 at Richfield Coliseum for Survivors Series on November 26

3) 21,000 at Charlotte Stadium for Great American Bash on tour (Dusty Rhodes vs. Tully Blanchard barbed wire match, Ric Flair vs. Road Warrior Hawk) on July 18

4) 20,000 at Joe Louis Arena in Detroit on February 21 for Saturday Night's Main Event taping including a Battle Royal with Hulk Hogan and Andre the Giant

5) 19,745 at Madison Square Garden in New York on September 21 for Hulk Hogan vs. One Man Gang

## THE GREATEST MATCH OF THE OBSERVER YEARS

By Jeff Bowdren

The greatest match of the past five years covers a lot of territory. Before I start, let me say that I'm of the opinion that wrestling, as far as work rate is concerned, is better now than it has ever been. During the 1960s and 1970s there were some truly great wrestlers, The Funks, Jack Brisco, Nick Bockwinkel and many others, but I think overall today's wrestlers are better conditioned and overall, have better matches. The talent in the major promotions seems to run much deeper than in decades before.

Let me also stress a couple of other things. First is that this is my opinion. If you put 20 fans in a room and asked them what the greatest match of the past five years was, you would probably get 20 different answers. Second, the matches I've picked must meet certain criteria. I think for a match to be classified as "great," obviously the work rate must be of a superior nature. The work can't be just good, but superior. I also think the match should be able to get you out of your seat and give it the old Harry Caray routine ("HOLY COW!!") over several moves or bumps that take place. There also must be an abnormal amount of heat in the building. I don't know about you, but I can watch a very good match and if the audience isn't into it, it somehow isn't quite as interesting. But if the crowd is at a fever pitch the entire match, I'm glued to the television or if I'm there live, it makes the match more fun to watch. I also feel the match should have something else to make it even better. By that I mean it should have started or ended a feud or perhaps have made the public become aware of a certain wrestler. A great match should have most or all of those things.

Hulk Hogan and Andre the Giant wrestled before the biggest gate and the largest crowd ever, and the match had incredible heat, but the bout itself was awful. On the other hand, Eddie Gilbert and Sam Houston can wrestle to a 60 minute draw in front of 500 fans in Vicksburg, MS, but if those were the only people who saw it, can it rank as the greatest match of all time?

Before giving you the top 10, I'm giving to list five matches that didn't make the list, but were still great. There was a match between Tommy Rich & Eddie Gilbert against the PYTs (Koko Ware & Norvell Austin) on May 14, 1984 in Memphis that was one of the craziest bouts you'll ever see. Eddie and Koko wind up brawling in the cheap seats of the Mid South Coliseum while Tommy and Norvell are taking crazy bumps on the stage behind the grandstand, which is about eight feet off the ground. The match was action and insanity and shows that this was a highly underrated feud. Another is the match between The Fantastics and The Shepherders from the Crockett Cup in New Orleans in April, 1986. This was a classic bloodbath, with nobody coming out unscathed. It was definitely the high point of the first Crockett Cup. Several of the brawls with Stan Hansen & Bruiser Brody vs. The Funk brothers deserve mention, especially the December 13, 1982 match which was the finals of the World Tag League tournament. Ric Flair has probably been involved in more great matches than any wrestler in history, and two of his matches that barely missed the top 10 were his victory over Harley Race at Starcade '83 in Greensboro to win the NWA title and his win over Nikita Koloff (yes, Nikita) at the Great American Bash in July of 1985 at Charlotte Stadium. One of the great things about both of those matches is it gives one the opportunity to see Flair as a babyface, a role he is truly fantastic in.

Actually, I'm going to cheat a little and give you two matches which tied for tenth place. One is the tremendous match from Madison Square Garden between Sgt. Slaughter (back when he was still a wrestler) and the Iron Sheik. This was a Boot Camp match on June 16, 1984. The match had unbelievable heat and besides the great work in the ring, other factors made the match great. This was the apex of their famous feud, which came right at the height of USA-USA fever. It also represented the peak, and the beginning of the end, of both men's careers. Slaughter soon was fired from Titan and Sheik's work deteriorated and he became a cartoon character. But this match had everything. Blood, work, heat and even Gorilla Monsoon did a credible job of calling the action.

Another match which I couldn't leave out of the top ten took place on April 19, 1984. Antonio Inoki's New Japan promotion held a series of elimination matches. When this tournament started, most Japanese fans had never even heard of a young wrestler named Nobuhiko Takada. But after a spectacular match with Yoshiaki Yatsu, the world was put on notice. The only thing that keeps this match from being higher is it wasn't a long match. But from a pure excitement standpoint, matches don't get any better. During the last five minutes this match may have had more excellent near falls than any match in history.

My vote for number nine is a tag match from the fall of 1986 with Dump Matsumoto & Yasuko Ishiguro against Condor Saito & Bull Nakano. This was unique for a number of reasons. First, you had normal tag partners, Dump & Bull, as opponents. Second, the match took place shortly after one of Chigusa Nagayo's concerts and there was a brawl at the concert. Suffice to say, this match has to be seen to be believed. The match involved a gasoline can, scissors, a chain, nunchakus, kendo sticks and lots of blood. After all this mayhem, Dump and Bull shook hands after the match, then Dump collapsed. Fans of all-out brawls with love this one.

Number eight took place on July 4, 1983 in Fort Worth between The Freebirds



against David & Kevin & Kerry Von Erich. The Freebirds and Von Erichs may have had the greatest feud of all-time, and of the many great matches between the teams, this one, a 2 out of 3 fall match for the six-man title, was the best. While some have said their match on July 4, 1984 was even better, I chose this one because the 1984 match had Mike and this one had David. Actually, most of their six-man matches were good.

Number seven took place on June 12, 1986 in Osaka and involved blood the hard way. Tatsumi Fujinami and Akira Maeda went at it for 20 minutes and it was brutal. You could almost feel the pain as Maeda just kicked Fujinami to death. The match itself was really tight and the finish may have been one of the greatest of all-time, probably because it wasn't supposed to end that way. Fujinami was slumped in the corner as Maeda came in with his rolling leg kick. Suddenly, after the kick connected, the side of Fujinami's face is covered with blood. Fujinami made a short comeback until they both just passed out in the ring. This match, as much as any, showed the world that Maeda was a superstar. Fujinami even suffered a concussion from the kick which forced him to miss the remainder of the IWGP tournament, which he was supposed to go into the finals in.

Number six took place on January 20, 1987 in Fayetteville, N.C. Barry Windham has probably given Ric Flair the greatest matches of his career. Even though their February 14, 1986 match from Orlando was that year's match of the year, I think this match was superior. It went 38 minutes and was non-stop, and believe it or not, the match was made even better by the commentary of Dusty Rhodes. Both guys were at their best in this one.

Number five took place on January 28, 1986 pitting Riki Choshu & Yoshiaki Yatsu against Jumbo Tsuruta & Genichiro Tenryu for the International tag team titles. The match was special for a few reasons. First, the feud had been brewing for several weeks when Tsuruta attacked Choshu and "broke his ribs." Second, this is the match which catapulted Yatsu from being a star to being a superstar and being considered by many as the top wrestler in Japan. It had unparalleled heat and about 24 minutes of non-stop action with all four working tremendously.

At number four is a match from March 22, 1985 between Ted DiBiase and Jim Duggan from the Sam Houston Coliseum. It deserves mention for several reasons. It was one of the greatest stipulation matches in the history of wrestling. They fought in a cage, under tuxedo street fight rules, with a coal miner's glove on a pole and the loser had to leave town. It also had to be the greatest match Duggan was ever involved in. The match was also the peak of their feud, which won feud of the year in 1985. Additionally, DiBiase was even better than he normally is, taking some incredible bumps. This match had it all and easily could have been No. 1.

Number three is a match from August 22, 1985 between World Women's champion Jaguar Yokota and challenger Lioness Asuka. This match was the main event and drew the largest gate in the history of women's wrestling (\$275,000). Second, this probably was the greatest women's match of all-time. I defy anyone who doesn't like Japanese style wrestling to watch this match and not enjoy it. Jaguar is the greatest woman wrestler of all-time and certainly showed it here in this match. At one point she took a gordbuster from off the top rope. The match had more great technical moves than any match I've seen and the only reason, and I mean the only reason I don't rank it No. 1 is that it didn't last very long. However in seven minutes you had more action than you normally would in a 30 minute match. This match will get anyone hooked on Japanese women's wrestling.

Number two took place on April 23, 1983. I think the Dynamite Kid and the original Tiger Mask (Satoru Sayama) had probably the most underrated feud of all-time. Many of the matches these two had may have deserved mention, but this one was the best. I thought long and hard how to describe it, but it can best be summed up by saying it was a 25-minute long high spot. They never stopped. They did several things in the ring that would leave you with your mouth hanging open. The highlight of the match had to be the finish. Dynamite had Tiger up for the tombstone piledriver on the arena floor. He does it and Sayama looks dead. The Kid gets up and raises his arms to the crowd. As he turns around, Sayama gets up and gives him a tombstone piledriver on the floor. Both guys then collapse and are counted out of the ring.

We've finally reached No. 1 and I'll end the suspense by saying my choice for the greatest match of the last five years was Ric Flair vs. Kerry Von Erich on December 25, 1982 in Dallas at Reunion Arena. Besides the fact it was a great match, it probably had as much impact on the business as many match of the past five years. Okay, Hogan and Andre was seen by more people and had a tremendous impact, but I'm talking impact in a different context. The match was responsible by and large for making World Class wrestling the hottest promotion in the country for more than a year. It was the match which started the Freebird-Von Erich feud which may have been the greatest feud of all-time. Flair was tremendous, and Michael Hayes, as guest referee, did a great subtle heel turn during the match which came little by little and was a thing of beauty. The climax came when Terry Gordy slammed the cage door into Kerry's head. Truly a great moment in the history of wrestling. The whole thing was so great that even Bill Mercer's typically inane commentary couldn't ruin in. For impact, work rate, incredible heat, the angle it set up and what it meant to Texas wrestling, this is my choice as the greatest match of the past five years.

## THE 15 MOST INFLUENTIAL WRESTLERS OF THE PAST FIVE YEARS

### BRUISER BRODY

Ranked by many as the greatest brawling style wrestler of the modern era. . . Born June 14, 1946 in Michigan, and went on to play college football at the University of Iowa and West Texas State University. . . Had a stint as a taxi-squadder with the Washington Redskins under coach Vince Lombardi in 1968. . . Drifted into pro wrestling in 1973. . . Even at 41, Brody displays excellent agility and conditioning for a man 6-5 and 275 pounds, something which has been his trademark throughout most of his career. . . As with most grapplers on the list, Brody makes it not only because of his ring abilities, but because of how he's shaped the business. . . For one thing, Brody is the leading independent contractor in the U.S. Brody is probably the top attraction not signed with one of the major offices, and because of that has no doubt worked for more different promoters than anyone else on the list. . . Also, his wild barking style has had much effect with several imitators, such as Jim Duggan, Terry Gordy, Konga the Barbarian and most recently Nord the Barbarian, the latter of whom is trying to be almost a clone of Brody. . . Rated today as the best foreign wrestler by the majority of the fans in Japan, where he's been a leading draw since 1979. . . Has a reputation for "never doing a job" and in the past five years, we have record of just one, to Abdullah the Butcher in 1987 in Fort Worth. . . Brody's reputation out of the ring for being hard to deal with has spread over several continents. . . Although he worked on-again and off-again for World Class over the five years, and had two stints with the AWA, most of his headlines were made in Japan. . . In the spring of 1983, Brody & Stan Hansen won a tournament and were crowned the first PWF World tag team champions. . . Brody & Hansen later won the annual tag team tournament in December that same year. . . Brody also held the International title in Japan twice, first winning and losing it to Dory Funk, then winning it back again, before finally dropping the strap to Jumbo Tsuruta on August 31, 1983. . . Caused front page headlines in Japan in March of 1985 when he left Baba's promotion and joined Inoki. . . His matches with Inoki in '85 were classics, but the association was short-lived. During the December tag tournament on the day of the finals, Brody and partner Jimmy Snuka suddenly got off the train and didn't show up for the championship match. Brody had earlier gotten at odds with booker Seiji Sakaguchi and the night before the finals in a singles match, the two had a match which got out of hand with Brody using a chain on Sakaguchi's knee which caused Sakaguchi to make several demands, including

banning the chain. . . It appeared Brody was through in Japan, but at a summer '86 show in Honolulu, Inoki approached him about coming back for what amounted to the largest weekly deal ever paid a pro wrestler. Brody returned and worked two shows in September and was scheduled to return for the tag team tournament. . . A power struggle over Brody's immense salary and other ill winds from the East caused another break-up of their relationship, and it appeared Brody's days in Japan were over again. . . Brody was voted Best Brawler in the Observer poll from 1980-84. . . Somehow, Baba came back to Brody when he needed help and as 1987 ends, Brody has a new lease on life in Japan. . . Although still a potential major attraction for any promotion, it appears Brody will concentrate on independent dates to augment his Japan commitments in '88, plus is working heavily, due to his not being tied up contractually, on setting up personal appearances.

### RIKI CHOSHU

Almost every up and down cycle which has faced Japanese wrestling over the past five years has, at least in part, been influenced by the country's most popular heel. . . Born December 3, 1951 in Korea, Choshu was an accomplished amateur wrestler who went all the way to the 1972 Olympics in Munich as a freestyle wrestler in the 220.5 pound weight class. . . Left the amateur mat for pro wrestling in a much-ballyhooed contract signing with Antonio Inoki's promotion in December of 1973, and made his pro debut in August of the following year. . . Although Choshu had held the promotion's tag team title and held a version of the World title in Mexico, he was basically stuck in the No. 4 or No. 5 babyface position with New Japan. . . His big break came in 1982 when he turned on Tatsumi Fujinami, and the two had an immensely successful feud. . . Although Choshu was cast as the heel, the feud did wonders for his popularity which soon outshined not only Fujinami, but almost everyone else in Japan as well. . . His tag team combinations with both Animal Hamaguchi and later Yoshiaki Yatsu are ranked among the best duos of all-time. . . Although Choshu was one of the biggest drawing cards of the past five years in the ring, most of his influence has taken place out of the ring. . . In September, 1984, Choshu led a group of wrestlers, which included Yatsu, Hamaguchi, Masa Saito, Kuniaki Kobayashi and Isamu Teranishi along with Killer Khan in jumping from Inoki's group to Baba's group, a move which devastated Inoki and turned Baba's circuit red-hot. . .



bump on the floor and was knocked unconscious against Hogan, who thus was awarded the championship (which he dropped the next summer to Inoki). While injured, the houses continued to sellout every night, and the younger wrestlers realized that the business would survive just fine without the past-his-prime legend. . . . A coup-de-etat followed, ultimately unsuccessful, with Tiger Mask (Satoru Sayama), the leading casualty. The popularity of the business in Japan has never fully recovered from this point. . . . Inoki faced another crisis in September, 1984, when Riki Choshu, by then the most popular wrestler in the country among the hardcore fans, left the group and took about a dozen wrestlers with him, several of them key figures. . . . This had followed on the heels on the defection of Akira Maeda, groomed to be Inoki's successor, and Inoki's own protege Nobuhiko Takada to the UWF earlier that year. . . . Inoki's business limped along in 1985, but the signing of Bruiser Brody, who brought out the best in Inoki, and a sensational match against rival Tatsumi Fujinami made the feel Inoki was the Inoki of old. . . . In reality, however, Inoki never recovered his stamina from the Hogan match, and a problem with diabetes has pretty well relegated his work to a pretty poor level. . . . The return of the UWF wrestlers in 1986 should have brought business back, but the UWF style didn't go over well on television, and the promotion was afraid, due to the stubbornness of Maeda, to ever match Inoki with Maeda which would have drawn incredible interest. . . . Instead, Inoki arranged for a pair of mixed matches on October 9, with himself battling boxer Leon Spinks and Maeda meeting World Karate Association champion Don Nakaya Neilsen. . . . Although the plans were for Inoki to come out of it as a bigger hero than ever and Maeda get taken down a peg, the reverse occurred. . . . Maeda's match with Neilsen was the best mixed match ever, while Inoki's win over Spinks was a travesty of near-Ali level standards. . . . Still, Maeda's failure as a TV draw kept Inoki on top in '87, when Inoki faced another challenge in the return of Choshu and most of his army. . . . At this point, New Japan had the finest talent in the world, yet Inoki, then 44 and lacking stamina, was still the key guy. . . . Television ratings were poor all year, and even though Inoki was carried well in a feud with Masa Saito, the future of New Japan is very much in doubt. . . . As the year came to a close, Inoki set up a new feud, this time with popular TV comedian Mr. Takeshi, the Johnny Carson or Don Rickles of Japan. . . . The long-time New Japan fans hated this, but the promotion needed to take a gamble to get more TV support. . . . But every time Inoki has been counted out in the past, and there have been dozens of times, he somehow has always come back, and in most cases, stronger than ever.

#### JERRY LAWLER

The "King" of Memphis is probably the most popular local personality of any regional wrestling star. . . . Born in Memphis on November 12, 1949, Lawler broke into wrestling in 1971 after meeting some wrestlers while working as a disc jockey. . . . Lawler was not an athlete in high school, which he attended in Memphis, nor in college, where he earned an art scholarship to Memphis State. . . . Lawler has the art of the babyface interview down as well as anyone in the game, which more than anything has been the key to his success. . . . While he has many detractors in the business, since he has constantly kept himself on top for more than a decade, many times when business was poor, he is decidedly an innovative booker and has a style that can carry even the poorest of foes to a passable match. . . . Those who have watched him for years in Memphis rank him as one of the best workers around, although nationally his reputation as a worker is only marginal. . . . Over the past five years, many regions of the country had huge localized stars, and just about every one lost its luster when the WWF changed the face of the business. . . . Lawler, however, is still the King of Memphis wrestling and even invasions from the WWF and NWA and Mid South haven't been able to remove his lock on the city. . . . Lawler gained some national acclaim in 1982 for his feud with Andy Kaufman which led to an appearance on the David Letterman show. . . . In 1985, he appeared to be on the verge of getting a national push and was promised the NWA title belt, but it never materialized. . . . Held the AWA tag title for a few weeks in 1987, but it came at a time when the title meant very little. . . . Jarrett Promotions, in large part due to Lawler, has managed to survive the past five years better than almost any other regional office. . . . But what of the future? . . . Lawler is now 38 and has never been known for his conditioning. No doubt that 17 years of wrestling has left him with lots of nagging injuries and his best days, both as a worker and as a drawing card, are certainly behind him. . . . But in an era of Hulk Hogan and the WWF, it is doubtful the promotion will be able to develop another drawing card to replace him. . . . The Memphis style of wrestling is very much different than that of wrestling anywhere in the world, and without Lawler, that style could easily become extinct.

#### AKIRA MAEDA

The man who was groomed as the heir-apparent to Antonio Inoki as the King of Japanese wrestling is now at the crossroads of a short, but stormy career. . . . Maeda, born January 24, 1959 in Osaka, was first discovered by New Japan chairman-of-the-board Hisashi Shinma while competing in a karate tournament in 1977. . . .

Choshu's style also forced the All Japan wrestlers to work a harder style and forced them into better shape and gave All Japan some of the best wrestling to be found in the world. . . Choshu finished second in the 1985 balloting for Wrestler of the Year. . . All Japan remained hot in '86 with Choshu as its leading drawing card. . . In early 1987, Choshu did an about-face, jumping back to Inoki for a huge money offer. Coming back with him included Super Strong Machine, Hiro Saito, Masa Saito and Kuniaki Kobayashi. . . While New Japan had drawn some impressive gates for its big cards in '86, its TV ratings weren't up to par. It was felt that with the return of Choshu, the TV ratings would return to their former top level. . . This time the jump proved to be not as successful. Choshu's double-cross of Baba damaged his reputation among most of the adult wrestling fans and damaged Baba at the gate, because he lost his biggest star. While still one of the two most popular natives in Japan (along with Inoki), his return helped business, but the TV ratings improved only slightly. He didn't save the ship. . . . As 1987 came to a close, Choshu was involved in a controversial issue with Akira Maeda, when the latter kicked him in the eye and broke a bone underneath the eye. When Choshu jumped back to New Japan, it appeared to many that Inoki's days on top of the promotion were over and Choshu would be the new superstar. Now, with Inoki set to feud with Mr. Takeshi's forces, it isn't even known where Choshu will fit in next year. . . . In the ring, Choshu was involved in some of the best matches of the past five years, particularly in tags with Hamaguchi or Yatsu. . . While his critics, and there are many, categorize him as only an average worker who benefitted by being in and around great workers, and who lucked into his popularity, there is no denying his charisma. . . And there is no doubt that in the past five years he's been the balance of power between the two groups in Japan, and greatly influenced the style inside the ring of both offices.

#### THE CRUSH GIRLS

Lioness Asuka & Chigusa Nagayo brought women's wrestling to an unheard of level of popularity over the past five years. . . Asuka was born July 28, 1963 while her partner was born December 8, 1964. Both broke in with the All Japan Women's Wrestling Association in 1980, and the Crush Girls started about two years later. . . The idea of pushing teenagers, particularly teenage girls is something Japanese culture is noted for, but the success and longevity of these two in the spotlight is something that turned into a promoter's dream. . . The two have held the group's World tag team title on-and-off over the past six

years and are now household names in Japan. . . The popularity of the pair coincided with the peak of popularity of women's wrestling in late 1985. . . Not only did an August 22, 1985 card in Tokyo in which they split up, with Asuka challenging Jaguar Yokota for the World's title and Chigusa challenging Devil Masami for the All-Pacific title (both girls failed in their attempts to win the singles crowns) draw a record \$275,000 house, but less than a week later in Osaka, a hair match in which Chigusa lost to Dump Matsumoto drew another \$250,000 house. . . Several of the shows they headlined in Tokyo drew more than 7,000 fans, and they even had successful concerts and records that hit the pop charts. . . While women's wrestling in Japan fell from that unheard of level, a return hair match between Chigusa and Dump in November of 1986 drew \$174,000, and today the woman's promotion is still doing a healthy daily business. . . The popularity of the Crush Girls even caught the eyes of Titan Sports, although it was the JB Angels, a younger and cuter pair, that were brought into the U.S. for a tour in 1987 and made a big hit. . . Although when the pair first made it big, it was Asuka who was decidedly the better worker, although both were green in the beginning, nowadays Chigusa is the star of the promotion. . . Because of the rough style of the group, both have been plagued by injuries in recent years. Asuka, best noted for having the best Giant Swing in pro wrestling history, has had back and shoulder problems, while Chigusa missed several months in 1986 with a knee injury which required major surgery. . . Chigusa continued to improve to the point that she may be the best worker, irregardless of sex, in the business today. She also did what Asuka failed on October 20, 1987, when she bested Yukari Omori in Tokyo to become the World women's champion. . . Due to the mandatory retirement age of female wrestlers in Japan, most likely when we review wrestling in five years, both Asuka and Chigusa will be out of the picture. But their impact on the women's sport will likely be felt even then, particularly if hard-style women's wrestling makes it in the U.S.

#### RIC FLAIR

The greatest wrestler of the past five years, and some say, the greatest of all-time is the bleached-blond, stylishly dressed native of Minneapolis. . . Born February 25, 1950, Flair played some college football at the University of Minnesota before starting as a pro wrestler in late 1972 in the AWA. . . Within a few years his charisma and interview style and World title potential was well known. . . Before the



end of the decade has established himself as one of the biggest names in the business. . . Pretty well has the reputation for being the best all-around performer of the past 10 years. . . His ability as a performer is likely comparable to those few athletes who are acknowledged as the best all-around in their field and maintain that standing for many years, such as a Wayne Gretzky or a Larry Bird. . . First captured the NWA title on September 17, 1981 from Dusty Rhodes in Kansas City and has gone on to hold the strap five times. . . Has been in the main event of several of the biggest gates in the history of pro wrestling. . . Won the title a second time from Harley Race on November 24, 1983 in Greensboro at the first Starcade. . . Lost the strap to Kerry Von Erich on May 6, 1984 in Irving, Texas before 32,123 fans paying \$402,000 and regained it 18 days later. . . Next brief title loss was to Rhodes, who won the belt July 26, 1986 in Greensboro before Flair regained it on August 9, 1986 in St. Louis. . . Once again Flair lost it on August 25, 1987 in Detroit to Ron Garvin and regained it at the fifth Starcade in Chicago on November 26, 1987. . . A lot has been written over the years about how Flair could be used better, and there is always the natural comparison with Hulk Hogan, which is unfair because the two are totally different types. . . But comparisons notwithstanding, Flair always makes a good spokesman for wrestling when he's interviewed by the media, puts on good matches night after night and has a large legion of fans.

#### THE FABULOUS FREEBIRDS

Wrestling's most famous threesome consists of Buddy Roberts, a veteran originally from Montreal, Michael Hayes of Pensacola, Florida and Terry Gordy, originally from near Chattanooga, Tennessee. . . Roberts, who began wrestling in 1967, was a member of the Hollywood Blonds with Jerry Brown and manager Sir Oliver Humperdink, one of the more famous tag team acts of the 70s. . . Gordy, born April 27, 1961, began wrestling at the age of 14 and had already built up a reputation as being one of the best big men in the game while still a teenager. . . Hayes, born March 29, 1959, also started wrestling as a teenager in 1977 and started teaming with Gordy as The Freebirds around Nashville later that year. . . The duo made their reputation in almost record time, as within two years they hit the Mid South area, and feuding with the likes of Junkyard Dog, Bill Watts and Buck Robley, set several attendance marks including drawing a few crowds of more than 20,000 to the Superdome. . . Made a national reputation in 1980 when they moved their base of operations to Atlanta and became the charismatic lead heels and tag champions on WTBS. . . Roberts

joined the two in Mid South when Hayes was out of action with an injured back. . . Besides being top draws for several years, the Birds influence on the business can be seen on almost every television and arena card nowadays when hard rock entrance music is played. . . While the Birds weren't the first to use entrance music, in fact Gorgeous George back in the 1950s entered to "Pomp and Circumstance" (same song Randy Savage uses today), they were the first rock and roll gimmick tag team. . . The Birds had a profitable run in Georgia, and later Ohio and Alabama, before heading to Texas in late 1982. . . After turning heels and feuding with the Von Erichs, they made World Class Wrestling a national force and some say, the hottest territory in the country. . . Over the last five years, although primarily based out of Dallas, the Birds has a brief foray with the WWF, which ended with lots of bitter feelings on both sides, a run in Florida with Hayes as booker, and a trip to the AWA which saw them not used to their potential, but still draw some great houses against the Road Warriors. . . The Birds move from World Class to the UWF in April, 1986 with booker Ken Mantell signalled the beginning of the war between the two groups. For a while it appeared UWF was going to run World Class clear out of Texas, but for whatever reason, the economy perhaps, perhaps they'd been in the area too long, and perhaps something else, but UWF just wasn't making it. . . With the Crockett buy-out, the threesome remained based in the UWF, but with the UWF collapsing, Gordy quit, and headed to Japan, and Roberts quit, citing that he wanted to be home more with his family. Hayes stuck around, and the long blond-haired symbol of the Freebirds was no longer with his long-time buddies. . . The Birds are no longer the hot item in wrestling that they once were, although Hayes is pushed as a major name and Gordy is well respected as one of the best big men around. . . Gordy, over the past five years, has also built a reputation in Japan and works 15 weeks annually for Giant Baba's promotion. . . However his career has slid down somewhat this past year, after several knee injuries have hampered his ability to go all out night-after-night. . . Gordy and Roberts are now teaming with long-time rival King Parsons as the New Freebirds in World Class; while Hayes teams with Jimmy Garvin in the NWA.

#### HULK HOGAN

If there was a pick as to the most influential wrestler of the past five years, the pick would have to be Hogan, who legitimately may be one of the most famous athletes in the entire world. . . Born August 11, 1953, the former Terry Bollea grew up in Tampa and attended the same high school as Mike Graham,

Dick Slater, Steve Keirn and Brutus Beefcake. . . Attended the University of South Florida for a few semesters, although he didn't play any sports in high school or college. . . Was a weightlifter and night club bass guitarist, and the 6-foot-5, 294-pounder was discovered originally by the Brisco brothers and then trained by Hiro Matsuda. . . Broke into wrestling in 1978 under the ring name Terry Boulder, and was joined by "brother" Eddie Boulder, who now wrestles as Beefcake. . . The two aren't brothers although they were training partners in Florida. . . Also wrestled in the South as Sterling Golden. . . While many in wrestling try and pass off Hogan as a fringe-level heel in those early years, in reality in Tennessee because of his size and blond hair and muscular physique, even as a green, inexperienced and poor worker, Hogan always had somewhat of a push. . . Made his national reputation in late 1979 when he came to the WWF and was dubbed by Vince McMahon, Sr. as "The Incredible Hulk Hogan." . . . Worked as a heel for Senior and feuded with Andre the Giant and fellow muscleman Tony Atlas, and also had a few title shots with then-WWF champ Bob Backlund. . . His match with Andre in Shea Stadium on August 8, 1980 was the semi-final to the famous Bruno Sammartino vs. Larry Zbyszko cage match which drew 35,771 fans and a then-record \$541,730 gate. . . Made his first tour of Japan in May, 1980 and became a huge success, making 19 more Japanese tours before becoming such a big name in the states that he gave up working Japan. . . Became a babyface in the AWA in 1981 and became its biggest drawing card of all-time, and the No. 1 box office attraction in pro wrestling. . . Appeared in a cameo role in the hit movie Rocky III, which was released in 1982. . . Went back and forth between the AWA and Japan until signing with Senior in November of 1983, and made his WWF return on December 27th, one day after Backlund's title loss. . . Captured the WWF title on January 23, 1984 in Madison Square Garden before a sellout 20,000 fans with 4,000 more watching on closed circuit from the Felt Forum. . . Hulkamania, born in the Midwest and Japan, came to New York and through McMahon, Jr.'s expansion plans, spread nationally. . . Over the past four years, Hogan has established himself as the biggest drawing card the business has ever seen, and the best paid wrestler of all-time. . . The first, and probably only wrestler ever to earn more than \$1 million from wrestling related business during a calendar year. . . Thanks to David Wolfe and Junior, Hogan was marketed to the general public and became a national phenomenon. . . While the success of the first Wrestlemania was largely due to Mr. T and Piper, Hogan's role can't be overlooked, and he came out of it the strongest of anyone. . . By Wrestlemania III on March 29, 1987,

Hogan clearly established himself as one of the most popular entertainers in the country. His victory over Andre the Giant drew a whopping \$17.1 million gate--something totally unheard of even a few months earlier. . . . Often criticized, and validly, for his work rate. . . Hogan is by no means a great wrestler, and in fact isn't even a good one. He was a better then credible performer in Japan, and does enough to get by in the States. But he's been used correctly and his weaknesses, such as lack of technical ability and stamina, have been well hidden. . . In truth, there have been plenty of wrestlers with far less ability in the past who got a big push, and tons more with great ability who have gotten a push, but nobody has done more with their push.

#### ANTONIO INOKI

One of the most famous athletes and a legendary figure in Japanese sports culture. . . Born on February 20, 1943 and began wrestling in 1960. . . . Worked in the States during the early-to-mid 1960s as a prelim wrestler. . . By the late 1960s, was, behind Giant Baba, the No. 2 native star in Japan. . . Through dozens of trials and tribulations, somehow--20 years later--has remained the most famous of all Japanese wrestlers since the days of Rikidozan. . . . Although Inoki was respected as a well-conditioned athlete and top-notch worker in his prime, by 1982, he was decidedly past his prime. . . His first big challenge had come more than 15 years earlier and several more were to follow. . . He quit the JWA (then the main promotion in Japan) and along with Hiro Matsuda and Masa Saito, formed an independent group which ultimately failed. . . Was welcomed back to JWA, but failed in a power struggle to gain control and was kicked out. . . Formed his own company, with himself as the top star, which eventually went bankrupt. . . Finally made a success of things with his New Japan Pro Wrestling Company. . . The company nearly collapsed after a 1976 fiasco with boxer Muhammad Ali, which left Inoki's legend in shambles. . . Somehow, Inoki's business came back and his reputation grew with mixed matches against bodybuilder Mike Dayton, judo world champion Wilhelm Ruska, boxer Chuck Wepner and others. . . Called by some, the "Japanese Dream" or the Japanese Dusty Rhodes for his continual self-promotion over younger and better performers. . . But five years ago, Inoki's legend as a wrestler was untouched in Japan and his business was booming like no promotion before ever had. . . Things were sailing smoothly in 1983, with Inoki sponsoring a tournament to declare himself as World champion when the walls came tumbling down. . . In the finals of the tournament, an accident occurred and Inoki took a bad



Nearly 6-foot-3, with a charismatic air about him, he was sent to Florida to get training from Karl Gotch. . . . Made his pro debut in the summer of 1978 and worked in prelims for a few years before he was sent to Europe where he wrestled under the name Kwik-Kik Lee, ironically billed as the cousin of "Sammy Lee," who had been a big hit in England (Sammy Lee was Satoru Sayama). . . . Held one version of the European title in England which he won from Wayne Bridges on December 25, 1982. . . . Returned to Japan amidst much fanfare on April 23, 1983 and pinned Paul Orndorff. . . . Although Maeda worked well against Japanese foes, and in particular, when teaming with Tatsumi Fujinami had some great battles against Riki Choshu & Animal Hamaguchi, he was tentative in the ring and generally unimpressive against American foes. . . . When Shinma formed the UWF, he called on Maeda to be his top star. . . . Through connections with Titan, Shinma sent Maeda on a WWF tour in early 1984 before the UWF would start operations in April. . . . The tour was a disaster as Maeda didn't work well with the Americans, and was humiliated by doing jobs for the likes of Rene Goulet and George Steele. . . . Maeda returned, embittered against U.S. style showmanship wrestling, and was determined to turn the UWF wrestling into the toughest wrestling style around. . . . The UWF picked up a cult following, and even though Maeda was decidedly not its top star, Sayama was, he became the symbol of the group with his outspoken attitude against U.S. wrestling and Japanese wrestling. He would regularly issue challenges to Fujinami, considered by the hardcore fans as the best wrestler New Japan had, and would mockingly deride Inoki as well. . . . The UWF style was the most vicious and stiffest wrestling style of this era, and although it was billed as shooting, certainly was not, although it probably came as close as pro wrestling has ever come to sport in recent years. . . . When the UWF folded, mainly because it never got on television, Maeda and company were signed by New Japan. . . . Maeda quickly became, aside from Inoki, the leading name for New Japan. His style of a combination of karate style kicks, some excellent technical moves like quick suplexes and submission holds literally overpowered and overshadowed his Japanese opponents. . . . Maeda's reputation spread world-wide after an April, 1986 match with Andre the Giant, which turned into a major disaster. Andre, purportedly either drunk, or told by New Japan to take Maeda's ego down a notch, wouldn't sell anything for Maeda and was laughing at every offensive Maeda made. At the 15:00 mark of what was turning into one of the worst matches of all-time, Maeda turned to Kantaro Hoshino at ringside and said something to the effect of, "Can I finish him off." In other words, Maeda wanted to shoot with a man who had him by eight inches and

somewhere between 250 and 300 pounds. Hoshino said nothing, just turned his head and Maeda started throwing shoot kicks to the knee. Although Andre laughed them off, eventually he went down. When he got up, Maeda started with amateur single-leg takedowns and took the Giant down with little problem four times at which point Andre just layed on his back and dared Maeda to come and get him. With everything out of control Inoki came out and the fiasco was finished. . . . Maeda was also involved in an out-of-control situation with Sayama just prior to the folding of the UWF, and his reputation to the fans as a shooter was growing. . . . Finally a match between himself and Inoki was arranged for March of 1986 and tickets sold out to the tune of nearly \$300,000 in a few hours, when suddenly the card was changed to a 10-man tag match instead. . . . To Maeda's fans, it was because Inoki was afraid, although in reality it was probably more Inoki didn't yet trust Maeda. . . . A match in June with Fujinami, decidedly not a shoot but a super match in which Fujinami did a believable and realistic job selling Maeda's moves, furthered his reputation, which reached its peak when he disposed of World Karate Association champ Don Nakaya Neilsen in the fifth round by submission on October 9. . . . At the same time, several Americans who have toured Japan and worked with Maeda claim his shooter rep is highly overrated. . . . But at least two other incidents of shooting took place. In one, he knocked out Hoshino with severe kicks; another occurred away from the ring in a street fight where he knocked out Keiji Muto. . . . Undoubtedly his reputation was endangering his career and at the same time making him a cult hero. . . . The final straw took place on November 19, 1987 in Tokyo. During a 6-man tag with himself & Nobuhiko Takada & Osamu Kido against Riki Choshu & Masa Saito & Hiro Saito, as Choshu put Kido in the scorpion deathlock, Maeda came from behind with a shoot kick to the eye, breaking a bone underneath Choshu's eye. Not only did this put New Japan in a precarious p.r. position, having to reprimand someone for "shooting," but it knocked Choshu, one of Japan's biggest drawing cards, out of action during the all-important tag team tournament. . . . At present, there are all sorts of rumors as to what Maeda's future holds, but it is evident New Japan will be phasing him down in 1988, if they even let him back in.

#### RODDY PIPER

More than any other, Piper was the man who made a success of Vince McMahon Jr. and David Wolfe's Rock and Wrestling Connection. . . . Born April 17, 1951 in Winnipeg, Canada of Scottish parents. . . . Roderick Toombs was a high school dropout, did some boxing, played the bagpipes in a marching band,

and somehow drifted into pro wrestling as a TV jobber with the AWA in 1972. . . Got his first break a few years later as a skinny heel in Los Angeles who drew consistently well in the mid-70s. . . Even then was one of the best talkers in the game. . . Was a main eventer from then on, decidedly more for his gift of gab than for any skills in the ring, although he was a hard-working performer. . . Went to the Carolinas in 1980 and as a heel feuded with the likes of Ric Flair, Paul Jones, Wahoo McDaniel and Jack Brisco in main events. . . May not have been the first heel color commentator, but was the first to make it big on national television in 1981-82 on WTBS' Georgia Championship Wrestling. . . Turned babyface in 1982 after being stabbed by an irate fan in Raleigh, N.C. . . Was among the biggest drawing cards in the nation by this time as a babyface, although he was also getting a bad reputation in other ways. . . Went to Titan Sports just after Christmas of 1983 and quickly worked his way up to the lead heel role. . . His "Piper's Pit" became a cult classic, even if most long-time fans considered his work far beneath his stint in Georgia on the mic. . . He was a key factor in getting over the Cyndi Lauper MTV angle, and was decidedly the lead heel in the first Wrestlemania. . . By that point, Piper ranked very close to Hogan as the leading drawing card in the game and made several demands, including refusal to do a job for Hogan. . . Named Heel of the Year in 1984 and 1985. . . Reportedly earned in excess of \$15,000 weekly while on top with Titan. . . After a fiasco of a boxing match with Mr. T at Wrestlemania II, in which he was decidedly the babyface in the eyes of the fans even though pushed as the heel, Piper took a few months off for his first stint in Hollywood in the flick "Body Slam." (still yet to be released) . . . Upon his return, was turned babyface and feuded first with Bob Orton, and later with Don Muraco and Adrian Adonis. All were major disappointments at the gate. . . In February of 1987, Piper shocked the wrestling world by announcing his retirement as he had several offers from Hollywood. . . Gave a tearful farewell, and beat Adonis in a hair vs. hair match at Wrestlemania III to close out his career. . . While with Titan, Piper's matches were generally around the seven minute mark, although he did a good job carrying the brawls, he didn't sell much and upon reaching stardom, decided he no longer had to take too many bumps. . . Was bothered by knee and back problems in the last year of his career, and worked his final match with a broken wrist suffered when he accidentally electrocuted himself a few weeks before the big show. . . Rumors about Piper's status run rampant, but the truth is he's done a TV pilot and two movies and if the work keeps coming, Piper's days as a wrestler are behind him.

Still, he'll be remembered for cracking a coconut on Jimmy Snuka's head, beating up jobber Frankie Williams in an interview and building up incredible heat for a feud with Bob Armstrong by fans around the nation, and for several other incidents by fans in Oregon and the Carolinas.

#### THE ROAD WARRIORS

You don't think the Road Warriors have had influence on this business? How many wrestlers are there with face paint? How many wrestlers are there who can't work a lick but are pushed because they are steroid-logged 280 pounders? How many imitation Road Warriors have popped up? At wrestling training schools, invariably the incoming students want to be either Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair or, you got it, the Road Warriors. . . Individually, you've got Road Warrior Animal, the former Joe Laurinidas, born January 26, 1960; and Road Warrior Hawk, the former Michael Hegstrand, born September 12, 1957. . . Spotted as two of the most monstrous bouncers in the Twin Cities and trained by Eddie Sharkey. . . The two broke into wrestling in late 1982. Hawk first worked in British Columbia for Al Tomko under the ring name Crusher Von Haig. Animal started on Atlanta TV just before Thanksgiving of that year and annihilated a few foes as simply, The Road Warrior, but he didn't stick and did work as TV jobber Joe Lauren in the Carolinas before returning home. . . Both were powerlifters, and Animal a former college footballer at Moorehead State University. . . Animal, 6-foot tall and 285 pounds, can bench press in excess of 575 pounds. Hawk, 6-foot-2½ and 275, pushes nearly 550. . . The Road Warriors got their first break in June of 1983 when a spot for National tag champs managed by Paul Ellering opened up when the heir apparents to the spot, Matt Borne & Arn Anderson, fell apart when Borne was fired. . . Although green in the ring, the two muscleman made a huge and immediate national impact. . . Wrestling mags immediately got on the bandwagon, pushing the two heels as the greatest tag team of all-time practically before they even knew how to lace up wrestling boots. . . Although to this day they still have working weaknesses, a lack of stamina particularly in Animal's case (although since they almost always work tag matches, this is somewhat of a moot point), they are one of the best tag teams in the game. . . This latter problem destroyed the credibility of virtually every babyface in the AWA, and was a minor factor in the circuit's downfall. . . Certainly have proven to be the hottest drawing tag team in the modern era. . . Debuted in Japan in March of 1985 where the threesome of Hawk, Animal and Ellering earn \$10,000 per week. . .



While the Warriors themselves weren't bad, considering their lack of experience, and in truth, improved greatly in 1985 and are a good working team, their influence has been negative in many people's eyes. . . The huge initial success and impact of the Warriors showed promoters that they could take untrained, but large-muscled guys and strictly through physique, get them over to the public. The public bought the premise by and large, and it created a situation where several of today's biggest stars are green, unskilled and in some cases, totally unathletic. . . And while the two are undeniably right at the top of the popularity charts and for a first time in the town basis, rank behind only Hogan as draws, their drawing power falls off greatly with frequent appearances. In truth, the Warriors were with one promotion when it folded, the GCW office, and on top. Another, the AWA, declined greatly while the Warriors were headlining, and now the NWA collapsed in 1987, although the Warriors probably played no part whatsoever in that. . . The two are always rumored to be WWF-bound, so much so that it has become almost a ludicrous topic of discussion. In truth, negotiations at one point in 1987 got to the point where they were in McMahon's office, but it wound up with them signing long-term with Crockett. It was a key move by Crockett, and the negotiations proved the Warriors were in a strong bargaining position with at least one side. . . Named tag team of the year in 1984 and have always placed in the top three or four in similar awards balloting since their '83 debut. . . Animal probably does as good a job of displaying raw power in the ring as any wrestler. . . Still, many fans actually liked them better as heels, although it would be nearly impossible to "turn" them back.

#### DUSTY RHODES

Virgil Riley Runnels, Jr., the plumber's son from Austin, Texas, grew up to be one of the most popular wrestlers of all-time, but by the end of 1987 had turned into the most controversial figure in the business. . . Born November 12, 1945, Runnels played both college football and college baseball at West Texas State University. . . Had a short stint in the Continental Football League, a minor pro league which no longer exists. . . Broke into pro wrestling in 1967 and shortly thereafter formed a tag team with Dick Murdoch called "The Texas Outlaws." If cable television was around in those days, they probably would have been equivalent to the modern-day Road Warriors. Although the physiques were different, the unique interview style and aggressive ring work were there. . . Rhodes, who took his ring name from his favorite baseball player, was among the best heels in the business before long. . . The switch to babyface came in 1974, and was as successful

a turn as ever has been done. . . With the possible exception of Bruno Sammartino, Rhodes was the most popular wrestler in the country for the remainder of the decade. . . He was the biggest drawing card in the South, and had a large following in the North as well. . . Held the NWA title briefly on three occasions. Won it August 21, 1979 from Harley Race in Tampa and lost it five days later to Race in Orlando. Regained it from Race on June 21, 1981 in Atlanta before losing it on September 17, 1981 to Ric Flair in Kansas City. Captured it once more from Flair on July 26, 1986 in Greensboro and dropped it on August 9, 1986 in St. Louis. . . While Rhodes was never a model for physical conditioning, in recent years his 300-plus pound frame and huge girth along with mountains of flab have brought much criticism. . . Criticism of Rhodes as a booker goes way back to Florida, where wrestlers often have alleged that every wrestler who got over in a big way in Florida and threatened his top position, soon found themselves out of the territory. . . With Sammartino's retirement and before Hogan hit it big, Rhodes was quite possibly the No. 1 drawing card in the country,

. . . Rhodes finally left Florida for good in 1984 and became booker for Jim Crockett Promotions. The promotion did well in 1985 and 1986, while the rest of the wrestling world was crumbling at Vince McMahon's feet. He must be commended for keeping the standard of work in the ring to a much higher level than McMahon's and running several hot angles. . . What happened in 1987 is a story that has been repeated too many times. Suffice to say that as 1988 begins, Rhodes is on the hot seat. Certainly the era of Dusty Rhodes as the babyface to build a promotion around is long over, even if he can be very effective in a supporting role. The era of appealing to wrestling fans in the Southern value structure, at least with a national promotion, is over if there ever was such a time when that could have worked. . . Lots of changes need to be made, some of which are being worked on, others of which are ignored. . . As a worker, well Rhodes is probably no worse than any other man 70 pounds overweight, beset by ring injuries and 42 years old would be. But who else in that condition would be trying to pass themselves over as the biggest star of their promotion?

#### RANDY SAVAGE

"The Macho Man" has gone from the bottom of wrestling to very near the top rung in the past five years. . . Born Randy Poffo, son of wrestler Angelo Poffo, on November 15, 1952. . . Played a few years of minor league baseball

before drifting into pro wrestling as his father and younger brother had done. . . Actually wrestled a bit during the off-season while playing ball under a mask as "The Spider" a few times before going full-time as a wrestler in 1975 as Randy Poffo, forming a tag team with brother Lanny. . . Father Angelo, who still wrestles small-time shows despite being in his 60s, is best known for once performing 6,033 sit-ups consecutively, then a world record. . . Even though Savage is one of the most talented workers in the business, a great deal of success has to be attributed to his wife Elizabeth, whose shy, demure ring character is a 180° contrast with most pro wrestling valets. . . It wasn't that many years ago that times were tough for Savage, despite his insiders rep as being one of the best workers in the country. . . He was blacklisted out of the wrestling mainstream. Several reasons have been cited. At one time, he had an out-of-the-ring altercation with Bill Dundee, who worked for Jarrett Promotions, which had a bitter war with Randy's father's now-defunct ICW promotion in Tennessee and Kentucky. Dundee suffered a broken jaw and missed several months of wrestling and criminal charges were filed on both sides before they finally were dropped. . . As much as anything, the black-listing probably occurred because his father Angelo was running opposition promotions against the establishment. . . The business war with the Jarretts was one of the nastier ones in recent memory. Besides the Dundee incident, the Poffo group continually exposed the real names of the Jarrett wrestlers and even some of the wrestlers working for other Southern promotions. At one time, Savage, who had something of a tough-guy rep, offered \$100,000 for a three-on-one match against Dundee, Jerry Jarrett and Tojo Yamamoto. . . Times were tough in the dying days of the ICW, where Randy was recognized as World champion and generally feuded with brother Lanny. . . Finally the feud ended and both Poffo brothers went to work for Jarrett, and matches between Savage and Jerry Lawler drew some big gates, including a record-setter in Lexington, KY. . . Rumors of Dundee returning to the Jarrett office as booker, combined with an offer at about the same time from Titan Sports transformed Savage into a major league superstar. . . Elizabeth, who at one time was the TV announcer for the Poffo promotion, became Savage's mistreated companion and Savage became one of the key heels for Titan. . . His popularity as a heel became so strong that he was turned in early 1987, and as the year came to a close, was the No. 2 drawing card behind Hogan on the U.S. wrestling scene, and very possibly second in money earnings as well. . . Held the Intercontinental title for most of 1986 before losing to Ricky Steamboat at Wrestlemania III in Pontiac, MI in what will go down as a legendary match in wrestling history. Certainly it was the best match ever in the U.S. watched by so vast a paying audience.

#### SATORU SAYAMA

The story of Satoru Sayama is one of the most interesting and amazing ones in recent wrestling annals. . . Achieved legendary status in an incredibly short period of time. . . Born November 27, 1957 in Tokyo. . . Started pro wrestling as a teenager in 1977 but because he was so small in size and quick with his feet he was steered toward kick boxing. Was a pro kick boxer for a while. . . Is easily the fastest wrestler, both in foot speed and movement, of all-time. . . Wrestled in Mexico where he learned acrobatic style, England where he learned scientific technique (he used the ring name Sammy Lee, billed as Bruce Lee's cousin while in British rings) and also trained with Karl Gotch in Florida. . . In 1981, New Japan chairman of the board Hisashi Shinma purchased the rights to bill a wrestler as "Tiger Mask," which was a character in a very popular children's cartoon in Japan and picked Sayama to play the part. . . On April 13, 1981, Tiger Mask debuted in Tokyo and pinned the Dynamite Kid. . . The plan was for Tiger Mask to be a middle-of-the-card middleweight performer (he probably weighed 170 pounds at this point) mainly to appeal to children. . . However his amazing ring speed and acrobatic ability captured the imagination of the country and he soon became a national hero. . . Within a few months, New Japan was the hottest promotion in the world and Tiger Mask was a main reason. . . Tiger Mask first won the WWF jr. heavyweight title on January 1, 1982 by defeating Dynamite Kid after Tiger's popularity became such that the promotion was forced to promote long-time champion Tatsumi Fujinami into the heavyweight ranks. . . Of course Sayama's wild style caused many injuries, and frequent knee operations, which caused him to forfeit the title, although as Tiger Mask, he went undefeated in Japan rings. . . Stripped of the title after an operation, Tiger Mask came back and on successive days, defeated Les Thornton on May 24, 1982 to become the NWA jr. heavyweight champion and the next night defeated Black Tiger (England's Mark Rocco) to win the WWF jr. crown back. . . The NWA dropped recognition of Tiger Mask as champion quickly. . . By September, his reputation had spread world-wide and he and Dynamite had a match at Madison Square Garden which is still talked about as being the best match in the history of New York's most famous arena. . . Several more tours of the WWF were scheduled, and although he made only three or four television appearances, his impact was noticable. . . After suffering a neck injury against Dynamite Kid in April, once again vacated both jr. heavyweight belts. . . Regained the NWA belt on June 2, 1983 in Mexico City defeating Fishman before 25,000 fans. . . Ten days later defeated Kuniaki Kobayashi in Tokyo to regain the WWF belt. . . The Tiger-Kobayashi match was the



semi-main event to the famous Antonio Inoki vs. Hulk Hogan match which resulted in Inoki's injury and the coup-de-etat attempt, which Sayama was behind. . . . When the coup failed, Sayama shocked the wrestling world by announcing his retirement in August. . . . Sayama later revealed to the press several embarrassing things about wrestling, such as New Japan blocking his planned wedding because they didn't want his identity revealed plus he was kind of a hearthrob type in Japan appealing to the young girls ala Ricky Morton. They also used his, and other wrestlers salaries to help finance Inoki's losing business efforts in Brazil. . . . The WWF then tried to bring Sayama to the U.S. in early 1984, however New Japan, which still had working ties with Titan, blocked the move. . . . Sayama returned in July with the UWF, but continued in the middle of one controversy after another. . . . It is widely accepted that Sayama himself was a nice guy, but the company he kept was generally unsavory. There were death threats at one point going back and forth between the UWF promotion and Tiger's business managers and both apparently had mob backing. . . . Sayama, who was a key reason for New Japan's success and the person who opened the door for junior heavyweight talent to shine in Japan, was so bitter that he and Akira Maeda decided to change pro wrestling in the UWF to "shooting." While it wasn't really shooting, it was a totally legitimate looking style of wrestling without high spots, concentrating on submission and amateur wrestling moves with hard karate style kicks. . . . Sayama even published very controversial books about his career, including one, "Kay-Fabe," which revealed many pro wrestling secrets. . . . Although Sayama, who wrestled in the UWF as Super Tiger because Giant Baba had purchased the rights to the Tiger Mask name and had put the gimmick on his own wrestler, Mitsuhiro Misawa, was easily the biggest star in the UWF, he didn't always win. . . . Suffered losses to Yoshiaki Fujiwara and Nobuhiko Takada on occasion. . . . Inner turmoil plagued the UWF, which because it couldn't get a TV contract (the mob backing of the group made the networks steer clear of them), seemed headed for financial doom. Sayama and Maeda bickered openly about what ring style should be employed. Sayama wanted to turn it into kick boxing, since he was superior with kicking skills, while Maeda wanted more of a kicking and wrestling style. . . . On September 2, 1985 in Tokyo, Sayama and Maeda wrestled in the main event. The match turned into a legitimate "shoot," with Maeda, apparently upon direction from his karate sensei, trying to actually injure Sayama. The officials saw this and panicked. Sayama eventually grabbed his crotch and indicated Maeda kicked him low, which from observers who were there live, didn't actually happen. It was an excuse to disqualify Maeda and end the match. Sayama never wrestled again. . . . There are many who believe Sayama was the greatest pro wrestler of all-time.

#### THE VON ERICHS

The most famous family in recent mat history, both for their in-ring impact as well as their out-of-the-ring tragedies. . . . Jack Adkisson, born in 1929, played football and track at Southern Methodist University. He went on to play some Canadian Football before becoming a pro wrestler in 1954. Although big an impressive looking by that era's standards, he didn't become a big hit until a few years later when he became the nazi villain Fritz Von Erich, master of the "iron claw." Was one of the biggest international names in the business through 1967, not only going around the country, but also was one of the leading heels in Japan as well. . . . Established his own promotion after some bitter wars in North Texas, turned himself babyface and by the late 1960s worked almost exclusively in Dallas as a babyface soon-to-be-legend. . . . Drew several huge crowds in the late 1960s and early 1970s challenging NWA World champions Gene Kiniski and Dory Funk. . . . Held the AWA title for a brief period as a heel in the early 1960s. . . . Decided by the mid-1970s, while his sons were teenagers, that he would build a promotion around the family, something attempted many times, but something which was never successful on the level of the Von Erichs before. . . . The first to enter the business was David, in the summer of 1977. David, born in 1958, attended North Texas State on a basketball scholarship but was red-shirted as a freshman and quit school to become a wrestler. . . . Kevin, born May 15, 1957, followed in his footsteps. Kevin was the best all-around athlete in the family, and was starting fullback at West Texas State as a freshman, before quitting and getting into wrestling. . . . The next member of the family to get into wrestling was Kerry, born February 3, 1960. Kerry was a state champion and in fact, set the state record in the discus throw and was a junior national champion in the event. He went to the University of Houston on a football and wrestling scholarship. He was red-shirted in football as a freshman, and made his pro debut during that time, on Thanksgiving weekend of 1978 beating Gary Hart. He participated in track, winning the Texas Relays, but followed in his brothers' footsteps leaving college after one year and getting into pro wrestling. . . . The family was promoted as the All-American, bible quoting Texas natives who ran the evil menaces out of town, all using the claw. . . . The promotion was at best, a moderate success with family ego always taking precedent over smart business practices. . . . Fritz retired in the summer of 1982 but his retirement card at Texas Stadium drew just 7,000. . . . But it was right about that time that Kerry became the teenage hearthrob of North Texas and his matches with Ric Flair were packing arenas. . . . The success

of World Class wrestling can be traced by December 25, 1982. The Flair vs. Kerry match at Reunion Arena drew a then state-record \$105,000 gate and during the match, Michael Hayes and Terry Gordy, brought in as babyfaces, screwed Kerry out of the title, setting up one of the hottest feuds in pro wrestling history. . . By the mid-point of 1983, World Class was the model promotion. Young babyfaces with rock music vs. brash young heels became the name of the game. The entire complexion of the sport changed from older wrestlers to younger and better looking wrestlers. Both the WWF and Mid South used many of the same tactics in 1984 and were successful with them. . . It was well-known in the business that the Von Erich image was a work, but among the wrestling fans, they were the most over babyfaces around. . . Even when Kerry was arrested in 1983 for allegedly smuggling drugs across the border from Mexico, the fans all believed that Kerry's hated enemy Michael Hayes had planted the drugs on him. Before any more publicity could come out of the case, the evidence strangely disappeared from the police station. . . The World Class show started syndicating nationally and the family had more fame than Fritz did during his heyday. . . David, who was considered the smartest of the sons and although he was definitely not the best athlete, because of his common sense, was regarded as the best worker, was apparently promised the NWA title in 1983. . . The promise didn't come through, which eventually led to a break-up between World Class and the NWA two years later. . . The first family tragedy isn't well-known because it had nothing to do with wrestling. The oldest son, Jack Adkisson, Jr., electrocuted himself in 1959 at the age of five. . . It was an omen of bad things to come. . . There was a grandchild victimized by crib death as well. . . The one which gained national attention of course was the death of David on February 9, 1984 while in Japan. . . David's funeral a few days later was front page news throughout North Texas and was the biggest funeral ever in that part of the country. . . Kerry promising to win the NWA title in David's memory at "The David Von Erich Memorial Parade of Champions" on May 6, 1984 at Texas Stadium drew 32,123 fans paying \$402,000 as Kerry captured the title from Flair. . . Kerry dropped it back on May 24 in Yokosuka, Japan. . . But the most tragic story was that of younger brother Mike. . . Unlike his older brothers, Mike was not a great athlete. He was pushed into pro wrestling at the age of 19, probably weighing around 180 pounds. Made his pro debut on November 18, 1983 beating Buddy Roberts in San Antonio, and after having been a pro only two months, was already a main eventer after having Ric Flair asleep at the bell in a 10 minute time limit match. . . Held the American title as a rookie and beat all the top heels, and probably did

less than a half-dozen jobs his entire career. . . Mike's physique wasn't constructed to take the nightly pounding of the mat game, and suffered frequent shoulder separations. . . Had a major operation in August, 1985 to correct the problem, and weeks later, on Labor Day Weekend, contracted toxic shock syndrome and nearly died. . . Suffered some brain damage from the 107° fever and dropped down to less than 140 pounds. . . At about the same time, a new relative was created, Lance Von Erich, in reality a local bodybuilder named Kevin Vaughn. He was billed as the son of Waldo Von Erich, who wrestled as Fritz' brother in the Nazi days. . . Although 1983 was surely the peak, with the Freebirds vs. Von Erich feud, business remained good through 1985. . . In 1986, the promotion took a beating and it has been at the bottom of the heap ever since. . . Its top heel, Gino Hernandez, died of a cocaine overdose at the age of 29, something which was reported heavily throughout the state. . . Mike, despite brain damage which hurt his equilibrium, returned to the ring on July 4, 1986 but became a pathetic and depressing sight in the ring. He had several out-of-the-ring scuffles, DUIs, etc. and was clearly crying for help. Not two weeks before his death, one of the wrestlers actually predicted Mike would kill himself before the year was out. Finally, after a DUI arrest in April, Mike overdosed, intentionally on barbiturates and died at the age of 23. . . A year earlier Kerry was in a motorcycle accident and suffered ankle damage so severe that nearly every specialist put to rest any hopes of a comeback. Still, in February of 1987, in hopes of getting a big gate, Kerry, who was still on crutches, wrestled one-legged against Brian Adias and in the process, re-broke the ankle. Kerry returned once again in October, and shocked the world by actually moving decent on the ankle, which was fused in a walking position by surgery. But after two months of steady wrestling, his limp has gotten more and more noticable and he's once again practically working on one leg. . . Kevin didn't escape tragedy either. He had frequent shoulder problems. In the summer of 1987, during a match in Fort Worth, he suddenly collapsed and had to be revived with CPR from Tommy Rogers. Although it was later explained he'd been hit with Brian Adias' "Oriental tool punch," the reality was of course something completely different. . . There was an incident in Japan where the Yakusa (Japanese mob) followed him from Osaka to Tokyo, but instead found his travel companion Rick Hazzard and did a major number on him. He had another near tragedy when his two-year-old daughter was accidentally run over. . . Most people in wrestling, while sympathetic to the family's plight, are somewhat critical that Fritz



heavily hyped all the tragedies and used them in an attempt to draw houses. For example, just six weeks after Mike's near death, he was wheeled out to the Cotton Bowl and it was heavily pushed to come see "the living miracle." . . . Fans were continually told that Kerry's return was "a month away" all through his 18 month absence from the ring, and several times he was used to hype crowds including the time he actually worked a match before he could walk without crutches. . . . The Oriental tool angle came from Kevin's misfortune, and in fact, it was heavily promoted that Kerry was going to "win the title for David" after David died in 1984. . . Their turning the 1987 Texas Stadium show into a "David and Mike Von Erich Memorial card" earned recognition as the single most tasteless promotional stunt of that year. . . And while promoting the heavy religious angle, and in fact, using preachers often as color commentators and to make appearances on television, they also promoted several mud wrestling matches at big cards in order to hype ticket sales. . . When Lance, who failed to work out because he was a poor worker and not suited mentally for the pressure of being a Von Erich at times, but not when it counted, quit the promotion, Fritz went on television and claimed that he was in no way related to the family (actually untrue, he was a distant cousin) and that he used the family in order to get a break in wrestling. . . And probably the worst example was the most recent, when the family created its own bogus tragedy, and apparent heart attack of Fritz after being attacked by four wrestlers on December 25, 1987, in order to build up an angle. While a week later the heart attack story was dropped ("We thought it was a heart attack, actually a blow with a cane knocked a bone into the spinal area and he suffered temporary paralysis"), it was evident they were using the family's history of tragedy, all of which had been used to build up gates in the past, and created their own to attempt to spice up weak gates..

## JAPAN'S GONG MAGAZINE LISTING OF THE 10 BIGGEST NEWS STORIES OF 1987

### UNITED STATES

1. Wrestlemania draws 93,173 fans to the Silverdome in Pontiac, MI
2. Hulk Hogan pins Andre the Giant
3. Ron Garvin upsets Ric Flair to win the NWA title on September 25 in Detroit
4. Nick Bockwinkel retires from wrestling after losing the AWA title and joins the WWF as a broadcaster
5. The UWF is sold to Jim Crockett Promotions and folds
6. Kerry Von Erich returns to wrestling on October 17 at the Cotton Bowl
7. Ric Flair regains the NWA title from Ron Garvin at Starcade '87 on Thanksgiving in Chicago
8. Mike Von Erich's suicide death at the age of 23 on April 16
9. Paul Boesch retires as Houston wrestling promoter after 55 years in the wrestling business on August 28
10. The WWF holds an Old-Timers Battle Royal on November 16 at the Meadowlands (this was important in Japan because Lou Thesz has achieved legendary status over there)

### JAPAN

1. The Antonio Inoki-Masa Saito feud climaxing with the Ganryujima match on October 4
2. Riki Choshu jumps from All Japan to New Japan
3. Genichiro Tenryu turns heel and keeps interest in All Japan alive
4. Akira Maeda's "shoot-kick" on Riki Choshu on November 19 in Tokyo
5. Bruiser Brody and Abdullah the Butcher return to All Japan after absences of several years
6. The New Leaders vs. Now Leaders feud
7. Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu form a tag team and capture the World Tag League tournament on December 11 beating Bruiser Brody & Jimmy Snuka
8. Animal Hamaguchi retires at the age of 39 after a 19-year pro wrestling career
9. Haru Sonoda dies in an airplane crash on November 28 at the age of 31
10. Famous comedian Takeshi Kitano gets involved in pro wrestling issuing a challenge to Antonio Inoki on December 4 at Sumo Hall

# CHAMPIONS OF 1983

## NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE

World's - 1. Ric Flair; 2. Harley Race; 3. Flair  
 World's jr - 1. Tiger Mask (vacated title due to injury); 2. Tiger Mask; (retired); 3. The Cobra or Les Thornton  
 Southeast: 1. Bob Armstrong; 2. Jimmy Golden; 3. Bob Armstrong; 4. Ken Lucas; 5. Bob Armstrong; 6. Golden; 7. The Flame (Joe Hamilton); 8. Golden; 9. Bob Armstrong; 10. Jos LeDuc; 11. Bob Armstrong; 12. Jerry Stubbbs  
 Alabama: 1. Mr. Olympia (Jerry Stubbbs); 2. Tony Charles; 3. Tom Jones; 4. Flame; 5. Rick Gibson; 6. Rick Harris; 7. Olympia/Stubbbs  
 U.S. jr: 1. Norm Charlies; 2. Rick Gibson; 3. Billy Ash; 4. Tommy Rogers; 5. Chic Donovan; 6. Gibson; 7. Donovan; 8. Tim Horner; 9. Rip Rogers; 10. Ken Lucas  
 Southeast tag: 1. Randy Rose & Dennis Condrey; 2. Ken Lucas & Eddie Hogan; 3. Rose & Condrey; 4. Hogan & Lucas; 5. Rose & Condrey; 6. Robert Fuller & Jimmy Golden; 7. Rose & Ron Starr; 8. Scott & Brad Armstrong; 9. Starr & Wayne Farris  
 American: 1. Kevin Von Erich; 2. Terry Gordy; 3. Kevin; 4. Jim Garvin; 5. Chris Adams  
 Texas: 1. David Von Erich; 2. Jim Garvin; 3. David  
 American tag: 1. Michael Hayes & Terry Gordy; 2. Kerry Von Erich & Bruiser Brody (vacated belts); 3. Super Destroyers; 4. King Parsons & Brian Adias  
 World 6 man: 1. Freebirds; 2. Von Erichs; 3. Freebirds; 4. Von Erichs  
 Missouri: 1. Harley Race; 2. Kerry Von Erich; 3. Jerry Blackwell; 4. Race (vacated belt); 5. Ric Flair; 6. David Von Erich  
 Central States: 1. Manny Fernandez; 2. Dewey Robertson; 3. Bob Brown; 4. Robertson; 5. Harley Race (vacated belt); 6. Super Destroyer; 7. Buzz Tyler  
 Central States tag: 1. Bob Brown & Buzz Tyler; 2. Yasu Fuji & Kim Duk; 3. Brown & Tyler; 4. Roger Kirby & Abdullah the Great (Jack Cougar); 5. Brown & Tyler  
 Southern: 1. Barry Windham; 2. Frank Dusek; 3. Ron Bass; 4. Mike Rotundo; 5. Bass  
 Florida: 1. Kevin Sullivan; 2. Mike Graham (vacated); 3. Scott McGhee; 4. Jos LeDuc; 5. Barry Windham; 6. LeDuc; 7. Windham (vacated); 8. Mike Rotundo  
 Global (later U.S. tag): 1. Ron Bass & Barry Windham; 2. Don Kent & Bob Hefferman (Kangaroos); 3. Terry Allen & Scott McGhee; 4. Kangaroos; 5. Allen & Midnight Rider; 6. Kangaroos; 7. McGhee & Allen; 8. Kangaroos; 9. Allan & Brad Armstrong; 10. Angelo Mosca & Bobby Duncum; 11. Mike Graham & McGhee; 12. Elijah Akeem & Kareem Muhammad; 13. Dusty Rhodes & Blackjack Mulligan; 14. Ron Bass & One Man Gang

Southwest: 1. Tully Blanchard; 2. Bob Sweetan; 3. Adrian Adonis; 4. Sweetan; 5. Blanchard; 6. Scott Casey

Southwest tag: 1. Ken Lucas & Ricky Morton; 2. Grapples (Len Denton & Tony Anthony); 3. Gino Hernandez & Tully Blanchard (vacated); 4. Grapples; 5. Sheepherders (Luke Williams & Jonathan Boyd); 6. Williams & Bobby Jagers (Boyd injured); 7. Jagers & Buddy Moreno (Jagers & Williams split; 8. Moreno & Scott Casey (Jagers injured); 9. Ken Limbs & Eric Embry

Southern: 1. Terry Taylor; 2. Jacques Rougeau; 3. Taylor; 4. Bill Dundee; 5. Dutch Mantell; 6. Dundee; 7. Mantell; 8. Dundee; 9. Jerry Lawler; 10. Man Mountain Link; 11. Lawler; 12. Jesse Ventura; 13. Lawler; 14. Ventura (vacant); 15. Lawler

Northwest: 1. Ali Hassan (Jack Cougar); 2. Curt Hennig; 3. Dynamite Kid; 4. Billy Jack; 5. Rip Oliver; 6. Jack; 7. Oliver

Northwest tag: 1. Billy Jack & Stan Stasiak; 2. Rip Oliver & Ali Hassan; 3. Jack & Stasiak; 4. Oliver & The Assassin (Dave Patterson); 5. Buddy Rose & Brian Adidas; 6. Oliver & Assassin; 7. Rose & Curt Hennig; 8. Dynamite Kid & Assassin; 9. Hennig & Pat McGee (Scott McGhee)

National: 1. Paul Orndorff; 2. Killer Brooks (vacated sort of); 3. Larry Zbyszko (stripped, then won tourney); 4. Brett Wayne (Sawyer); 5. Ted DiBiase

National tag: 1. Road Warriors; 2. Buzz & Brett Sawyer

Pacific Federation: 1. Harley Race; 2. Giant Baba; 3. Stan Hansen

International: 1. Bruiser Brody; 2. Jumbo Tsuruta

United National: 1. Jumbo Tsuruta (vacated); 2. Ted DiBiase

Int. jr: 1. Atsushi Onita (vacated); 2. Chavo Guerrero

Int. tag: 1. Giant Baba & Jumbo Tsuruta; 2. Stan Hansen & Ron Bass; 3. Baba & Tsuruta; 4. Tiger Jeet Singh & Umanosuke Ueda; 5. Baba & Tsuruta

U.S.: 1. Greg Valentine; 2. Roddy Piper; 3. Valentine; 4. Dick Slater

Mid Atlantic: 1. Jack Brisco; 2. Dory Funk; 3. Brisco; 4. Funk; 5. Rufus Jones; 6. Dick Slater

Mid Atlantic TV: 1. Mike Rotundo; 2. Dick Slater; 3. Roddy Piper; 4. Slater; 5. Jos LeDuc; 6. Great Kabuki; 7. Charlie Brown (Jim Valiant)

NWA tag: 1. Sgt. Slaughter & Don Kernodle; 2. Ricky Steamboat & Jay Youngblood; 3. Jack & Jerry Brisco; 4. Steamboat & Youngblood; 5. Briscos; 6. Steamboat & Youngblood

## WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION

WWF: 1. Bob Backlund; 2. Iron Sheik

Intercontinental: 1. Pedro Morales; 2. Don Muraco

WWF tag: 1. Jules & Jay Strongbow; 2. Afa & Sika Samoans; 3. Tony Atlas & Rocky Johnson

World's jr: 1. Tiger Mask (vacated); 2. Tiger Mask (vacated)

International (Japan): 1. Tatsumi Fujinami; 2. Riki Chosyu; 3. Fujinami

International (Canada): 1. Billy Robinson; 2. The Destroyer; 3. Robinson; 4. Dino Bravo

## AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION

AWA: 1. Nick Bockwinkel

AWA tag: 1. Greg Gagne & Jim Brunzell; 2. Ken Patera & Jerry Blackwell

## OTHERS

North American (Canada): 1. Bret Hart; 2. Leo Burke; 3. Hart; 4. Dynamite Kid; 5. Allan Coage

North American (Mid South): 1. Stagger Lee (Junkyard Dog vacated); 2. Dog; 3. Butch Reed; 4. Dog

Mid South tag: 1. Ted DiBiase & Matt Borne; 2. Tiger Conway Jr. & Mr. Wrestling II; 3. DiBiase & Mr. Olympia; 4. Jim Duggan & Magnum T.A.; 5. Butch Reed & Jim Neidhart

Southern tag: 1. Sheepherders (Luke Williams & Jonathan Boyd); 2. Fabulous Ones (Stan Lane & Steve Keirn); 3. Sheepherders; 4. Fabs; 5. Sheepherders; 6. Fabs; 7. Moondogs; 8. Fabs; 9. Duke Meyers & Bobby Eaton; 10. Fabs; 11. Grapplers; 12. Dutch Mantell & Koko Ware; 13. Bruise Brothers (Dream Machine & Porkchop Cash); 14. Rick Morton & Robert Gibson; 15. Bruise Brothers; 16. Fabs

International: 1. Austin Idol; 2. Jerry Lawler; 3. Ken Patera; 4. Lawler; 5. Patera; 6. Idol; 7. Stan Hansen; 8. Idol

Mid American: 1. Wild Sabu; 2. Jacques Rougeau; 3. Bobby Eaton; 4. Koko Ware; 5. Eaton; 6. Stagger Lee (Ware); 7. Frankie Laine; 8. Dutch Mantell; 9. Buddy Landell; 10. Ware; 11. Landell; 12. Terry Taylor; 13. Randy Savage



# JARRETT PROMOTIONS

International: 1. Austin Idol; 2. Randy Savage; 3. Idol; 4. Masao Ito; 5. Tommy Rich; 6. Eddie Gilbert; 7. Dutch Mantell; 8. Gilbert; 9. Terry Taylor  
Southern: 1. Jerry Lawler; 2. Humungous; 3. Lawler; 4. Ric Rude; 5. Tommy Rich; 6. King Kong Bundy; 7. Lawler  
Mid American: 1. Randy Savage; 2. Jerry Lawler; 3. Jacques Rougeau; 4. Kostia Korchenko; 5. Mike Sharpe  
Southern tag: 1. Stan Lane & Steve Keirn; 2. Elijah Akeem & Kareem Muhammad; 3. Koko Ware & Norvell Austin; 4. Akeem & Muhammad; 5. Jerry Lawler & Jos LeDuc; 6. Tommy Rich & Eddie Gilbert; 7. Phil Hickerson & The Spoiler; 8. Ricky Morton & Robert Gibson; 9. The Nightmares (Ken Wayne & Danny Davis); 10. Dutch Mantell & Rich; 11. King Kong Bundy & Ric Rude; 12. Lane & Keirn; 13. Interns (Don Bass & Roger Smith)

# WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION

WWF: 1. Iron Sheik; 2. Hulk Hogan  
Intercontinental: 1. Don Muraco; 2. Tito Santana; 3. Greg Valentine  
WWF tag: 1. Tony Atlas & Rocky Johnson; 2. Dick Murdoch & Adrian Adonis

# NEW JAPANESE

WWF: 1. Hulk Hogan; 2. Antonio Inoki  
International: 1. Tatsumi Fujinami  
NWA Jr: 1. The Cobra  
WWF Jr: 1. Dynamite Kid; 2. The Cobra

Northwest: 1. Rip Cliver; 2. Buddy Rose; 3. Cliver; 4. Billy Jack; 5. Oliver; 6. Bobby Jagers  
Northwest tag: 1. Curt Hennig & Pat McGee; 2. Rip Cliver & The Assassin; 3. Tom Prichard & Brett Sawyer; 4. Mr. Ebony & Mike Miller; 5. Prichard & Sawyer; 6. Prichard & Jerry Gray; 7. Ebony & Miller

# AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION

AWA: 1. Nick Bockwinkel; 2. Jumbo Tsuruta; 3. Rick Martel  
AWA tag: 1. Ken Patera & Jerry Blackwell; 2. The Crusher & Baron Von Raschke; 3. Road Warriors

# MID SOUTH

North American: 1. Junkyard Dog; 2. Mr. Wrestling II; 3. Magnum T.A.; 4. Ernie Ladd; 5. Brad Armstrong  
Mid South TV: 1. Krusher Khrushchev; 2. Terry Taylor; 3. Adrian Street; 4. Bill Dundee  
Mid South tag: 1. Mr. Wrestling II & Magnum T.A.; 2. Dennis Condrey & Bobby Eaton; 3. Ricky Morton & Robert Gibson; 4. Condrey & Eaton; 5. Morton & Gibson; 6. Ted DiBiase & Hercules Hernandez; 7. Morton & Gibson

# SOUTHWEST

Southwest: 1. Scott Casey; 2. Killer Brooks; 3. Bobby Jagers; 4. Brooks; 5. Kevin Sullivan  
Southwest tag: 1. Eric Embry & Ken Timbs; 2. Al Perez & Lanny Fernandez; 3. Embry & Timbs; 4. Embry & Dan Greer; 5. Brett Sawyer & Chickie Starr; 6. Embry & Greer; 7. Jerry Oliski & Rick Casey

# LARGEST CROWDS

45,000	8/15	Islamabad, Pakistan	Antonio Inoki vs. Allen Coage
42,000*	11/22	Greensboro, North Carolina	Ric Flair vs. Dusty Rhodes
40,000	8/6	Peshwal, Pakistan	Antonio Inoki vs. Superstar
36,000*	5/6	Dallas, Texas	Ric Flair vs. Kerry Von Erch
35,000	8/8	Lahore, Pakistan	Inoki-Fujinami vs. Coage-Billy Crusher (Superstar)
35,000	8/10	Karachi, Pakistan	Antonio Inoki vs. Superstar
30,000	8/12	Kuwaita, Pakistan	Tatsumi Fujinami-Riki Choshu vs Billy Crusher-Fl Canek
29,000	9/15	San Juan, Puerto Rico	Bruiser Brody-Sten Hansen vs Carlos Colon-Abdullah Butcher
26,092*	1/23	Madison Square Garden	Hulk Hogan vs Iron Sheik
26,092*	2/20	Madison Square Garden	Hulk Hogan vs Paul Orndorff
26,092*	3/25	Madison Square Garden	Bob Backlund vs Greg Valentine
26,092*	6/16	Madison Square Garden	Sgt. Slaughter vs Iron Sheik
26,092*	12/28	Madison Square Garden	Roddy Piper-Bob Orton vs Jimmy Snuka-Tonga Kid
25,000*	5/21	Madison Square Garden	Sgt. Slaughter vs Iron Sheik
23,000	4/7	Superdome	Bill Watts-Junkyard Dog vs Dennis Condrey-Bobby Eaton
22,092	4/23	Madison Square Garden	Sgt. Slaughter vs Iron Sheik
22,092	11/26	Madison Square Garden	Tonga Kid vs Roddy Piper
21,777	3/11	Meadowlands	Battle Royal
20,800	6/16	Superdome	Hulk Hogan vs David Schultz
20,000	10/22	Madison Square Garden	Junkyard Dog vs Butch Reed
19,699	11/10	Philadelphia	Hulk Hogan vs John Studd
19,000	3/25	St. Paul Civic Center	Sgt. Slaughter-Junkyard Dog vs Iron Sheik-Niccoli Volkoff
18,977	7/15	Meadowlands	Gagne-Crusher vs Kaissey-Blackwell
18,300	3/4	Rosemont Horizon	Andre-Hulk vs Murdoch-Adonis-Stu
18,000	3/4	Capital Centre	Jumbo Tsuruta vs Blackjack Lanza
18,000	4/1	Rosemont Horizon	Hulk Hogan vs Iron Sheik
			Blackjacks-Bruiser vs Patera-Blackwell-Kaissey

\*includes closed circuit attendance

\*\*\*\*\*  
 Once again Greg Gagne, this time with Ken Resnick, appeared on radio call-in show "Sportsline." It was more nonsense as usual, but Mr. Mike could no longer resist. Toward the show's end I get my cue:  
 MM: "Greg, I have a serious question. I've heard that two of my favorite wrestlers, the Dynamite Kid and Davey Boy Smith have left the WWF and they'll be available after the current tag team tourney. My questions are What do you think of these guys and Will the AWA make any effort to book these tremendous talents?"  
 Greg: "...Ahh, I've seen them once or twice. I'm not real familiar with them. I did meet them once after a match. It's hard to tell on TV, but they're pretty small. I don't know how they'd do against some of the big wrestlers here in the AWA."  
 I tried to retort to that nonsense by pointing out to Greg he's hardly one to talk about wrestlers being too small. But while he's talking, I'm cut off. I'll have to let it slide for now. Even Greg's entitled to his jaundiced opinion.  
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## THE TWO FACES OF JAPANESE WRESTLING

For the past two years, there has been a strange phenomenon in Japan--the wrestling boom. In the last two months, that boom has turned into an explosion with pieces shattering in every direction. When, and if, all the pieces are finally picked up, it's hard to say how much, if any, permanent harm has been done to the sport.

The boom I'm referring to concerns the New Japan Wrestling Association. Two factors led to this boom, it's hard to say how much importance each one has as opposed to the other, because they happened and virtually the same time.

And the very cause of that boom, the seeds of the prosperity, were the seeds that fueled the eventual explosion.

The first reason for the boom was the appearance of Tiger Mask, in April 1981. Throughout the next year the sensational masked man wowed the sports fans with his incredible wrestling technique, tremendous balance and acrobatic maneuvers all blended into one style.

The other was the breaking of tradition and feuding the Japanese wrestlers with one another en masse. It all started a few months later in 1981 when a match between Antonio Inoki and Rusher Kimura, whose company the International Wrestling Enterprises had just gone bankrupt, drew one of the largest crowds in Japan wrestling history.

Throughout 1982, the sensational antics of Tiger Mask, and his newly-created arch-rivals Black Tiger, Kuniaki Kobayashi and Dynamite Kid often times stole the headlines from the established main eventers. At the same time, the largest crowds of the year were not drawn as in the past with Inoki, who was the company president and top drawing wrestler, against top American stars, but against Kimura and his partner Animal Hamaguchi. Gates of \$200,000 and up were becoming monthly occurrences, but even that prosperity didn't match up to what was upcoming.

A new feud was created in Japan involving the Japanese wrestlers, specifically the group of Masa Saito, Riki Chosyu and Killer Khan. The first two were former Olympians in the amateur ranks but always played second-fiddle to Inoki and Seiji Sakaguchi on the NJWA mat. The unique thing about this feud was Saito and company also feuded with Kimura and company and in addition, the Americans brought in feuded with all three sides. Instead of the baby face/heel arrangement in the U.S., you had four different groupings with the baby face/heel tradition lines virtually thrown out the window.

For the first six months of '83 profits for NJWA tripled. More than 90 percent of the cards sold out and turned fans away, and tickets for ringside at big matches were priced at \$50.

It seemed like a panacea. But what appears to be so on the outside isn't necessarily so.

The beginnings of the explosion can be traced to one of the strangest occurrences in a ring, Hulk Hogan's match with Inoki at the IWGP final. Inoki was scheduled to win this tournament but during the match was literally clobbered and had his head all but taken off by Hogan and was knocked unconscious for 23 hours. If the truth were to be told, Inoki nearly died that next day.

A strange thing happened with Inoki on the sidelines the next three months. Attendance wasn't hurt one bit.



In comparison to Inoki and Seiji Sakaguchi (company vice president and along with Inoki, the man with the most seniority), the pay scale for the remainder of the Japanese wrestlers--including Chosyu, Tiger Mask and Tatsumi Fujinami wasn't very high. It was well known profits from the company were astronomical, but at the same time, Inoki's company in Brazil, Anton High Cell, Ltd., which was to produce feed for cows by straining leaves of sugar cane was some \$10 million in the red.

Because of this, many of the NJWA wrestlers planned a "coup d'etat," or in pirate terms, a mutiny. Tiger Mask, who had several other gripes as well as reported here in the past, retired.

The other wrestlers, Fujinami, Chosyu and the remainder of the drawing cards threatened to quit before the late August-September series was to begin, unless Inoki, Sakaguchi and Hisashi Shinma, president of the WWF and IWGP and chairman of the board of NJWA all resigned their post.

According to what I'm told, Sakaguchi and Shinma were more or less running NJWA while Inoki concentrated on his other business interests (his wrestling school and other companies including the one in Brazil) and his training for competition. The wrestlers did accuse Inoki of using NJWA funds to subsidize his losing

business in Brazil.

The younger wrestlers, in fact, planned to form their own company originally but that idea was nixed when they were unable to come up with the nearly \$2 million needed to start this venture.

After much pressure from Asahi television network, the leading stockholder in the NJWA, Inoki, Sakaguchi and Shinma all resigned their posts.

Tiger Mask, whose retirement spurred on the action of the other wrestlers, had his wedding and has unmasked and is well known to the Japanese public as Satoru Sayama. He announced on Sept. 22 that he has become a pro boxer and will debut in that arena shortly. Sayama was a successful kick karate star before making it big in pro wrestling, and is so skilled with his feet that his move to boxing rather than kick boxing is a hard one to figure.



Shinma, who was the brains behind the boom, is no longer involved with pro wrestling. It's ironic, because it was Shinma's ideas which created the four-way feud, it was Shinma who brought the jr. heavyweights into prominence creating the title for Fujinami, it was Shinma who was the brains behind the creation of Tiger Mask and Shinma who was responsible for the stardom of Chosyu and Akira Maeda, all of whom were responsible for his demise.

Shinma also was responsible for negotiations with the Americans, so it's not known whether Andre the Giant and Hulk Hogan will return to the NJWA in the future.

The company is now run by Kotetsu Yamamoto, an ex-prelim wrestler who has served as color commentator on the TV show since his retirement. Other officers are Fujinami and a pair of other front office men was the previous administration who were also responsible for the coup d'etat.

Inoki has returned to the ring, although it's quite obvious his performance suffered due to his injury. He has turned over Anton High Cell Ltd. to his brother and gotten out of that business as well.

The younger wrestlers of this group have gotten their wish, they are getting paid better.

Eventually Inoki will be returned to the president's post. Eventually Satoru Sayama will return to wrestling, although no longer as Tiger Mask.

With the exception of Shinma, all things will wind up the same. Whether or not the fans will be willing to forget the bitter story that's been well-publicized in Japan, and accept Inoki and Fujinami as a tag team once again--well, fans have accepted more bizarre premises before.

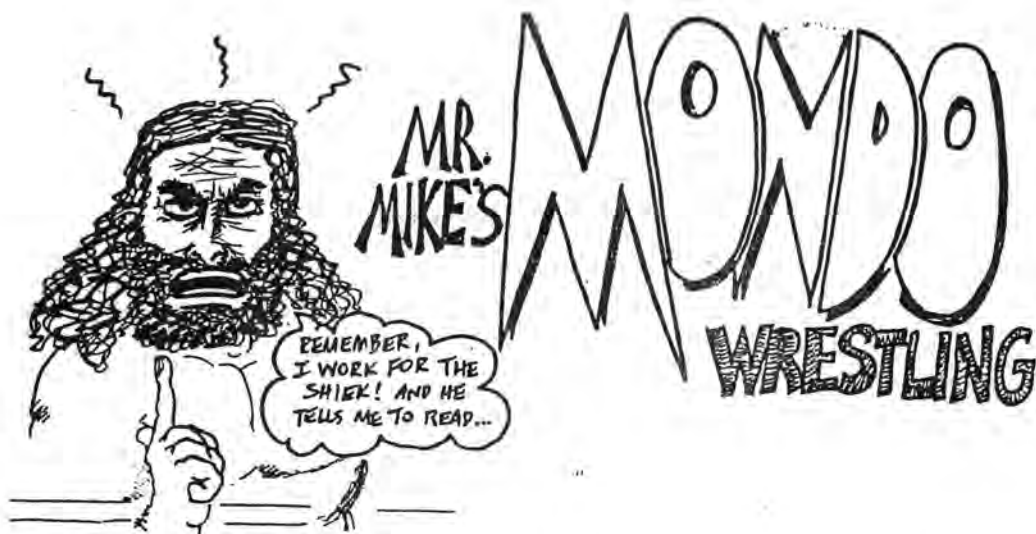
THAT'S RIGHT TURKEYS!  
MINNEAPOLIS' MONDO MAT  
MAN WILL BE HERE NEXT  
TIME, SO DON'T YOU DARE  
MISS IT!



James Janos

# NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE

**World's hwt:** 1. Ric Flair; 2. Harley Race; 3. Flair; 4. Kerry Von Erich; 5. Flair  
**United States:** 1. Dick Slater; 2. Ricky Steamboat; 3. Wahoo McDaniel  
**Mid Atlantic:** 1. Dick Slater; 2. Ivan Koloff; 3. Angelo Mosca Jr.; 4. Koloff; 5. Mosca Jr.; 6. Dory Funk; 7. Moses Jr.; 8. Ron Bass  
**Mid Atlantic TV:** 1. Charlie Brown; 2. Mark Youngblood; 3. Tully Blanchard  
**NWA tag:** 1. Bob Orton & Don Kernodle; 2. Wahoo McDaniel & Mark Youngblood; 3. Jack & Jerry Brisco; 4. Mark & Jay Youngblood; 5. Ivan Koloff & Kernodle; 6. Dusty Rhodes & Manny Fernandez  
**National:** 1. Ted DiBiase; 2. Brad Armstrong; 3. The Spoiler; 4. Armstrong; 5. Spoiler; 6. DiBiase; 7. Ron Garvin  
**National TV:** 1. Jake Roberts; 2. Ron Garvin; 3. Bob Roop  
**National tag:** 1. Buzz & Brett Sawyer; 2. Road Warriors; 3. Ron Garvin & Jerry Cates; 4. Ted Cates & Rip Rogers; 5. Brad Armstrong & Tim Horner; 6. Bill & Scott Irwin  
**Southern:** 1. Ron Bass; 2. Mike Rotundo; 3. Angelo Mosca Sr.; 4. Jim Neidhart; 5. Pez Whatley; 6. Kevin Sullivan; 7. Whatley  
**Florida:** 1. Mike Rotundo; 2. Kendo Nagasaki; 3. Billy Jack; 4. Billy Graham; 5. Scott McShee; 6. Jesse Barr  
**U.S. tag:** 1. Ron Bass & Black Bart; 2. Mike Davis & Mike Rotundo; 3. Bass & Bart; 4. Rotundo & Barry Windham; 5. Bass & Bart; 6. Rotundo & Windham; 7. Chavo & Hector Guerrero; 8. Jim Neidhart & Krusher Khrushchev  
**Southeastern:** 1. Jerry Stubbs; 2. Wayne Ferris; 3. Jimmy Golden; 4. Vic Rain; 5. Austin Idol; 6. Golden  
**Alabama:** 1. Jerry Stubbs; 2. Charlie Cook; 3. Vic Rain; 4. Rick McGraw; 5. Boris Zurcohv; 6. Porkchop Cash  
**U.S. jr:** 1. Ken Lucas; 2. Rip Rogers; 3. Larry Hamilton; 4. Rogers; 5. Johnny Rich; 6. Tommy Gilbert; 7. Rat Patrol; 8. Gilbert; 9. Rat Patrol; 10. Billy Ash  
**Southeastern tag:** 1. Ron Starr & Wayne Ferris; 2. Arn Anderson & Jerry Stubbs; 3. Jimmy Golden & Robert Fuller; 4. Anderson & Stubbs; 5. Rat Patrol; 6. Anderson & Stubbs; 7. Rat Patrol; 8. Mr. Wrestling I & II; 9. Rat Patrol; 10. Pat & Randy Rose  
**Missouri:** 1. David Von Erich; 2. Harley Race; 3. Jerry Blackwell  
**Central States:** 1. Buzz Tyler; 2. Tully Blanchard; 3. Tyler; 4. Luke Graham; 5. Ted Oates; 6. Tyler; 7. Hacksaw Higgins; 8. Harley Race  
**Central States tag:** 1. The Grapplers; 2. Ted & Jerry Cates; 3. Grapplers; 4. Marty Janetty & Tommy Rogers; 5. Grapplers; 6. Janetty & Rogers; 7. Mr. Ford & Gypsy Joe; 10. Janetty & Bob Brown  
**World 6 man:** 1. Kevin & Kerry & David Von Erich; 2. Michael Hayes & Terry Gordy & Buddy Roberts; 3. Kevin & Kerry & Mike Von Erich; 4. Gino Hernandez & Jake Roberts & Chris Adams; 5. Von Erichs  
**American:** 1. Chris Adams; 2. Jimmy Garvin; 3. Gino Hernandez; 4. Mike Von Erich; 5. Hernandez; 6. Kerry Von Erich  
**Texas:** 1. David Von Erich; 2. Gino Hernandez  
**International:** 1. Jumbo Tsuruta  
**Pacific Federation:** 1. Stan Hansen; 2. Giant Baba  
**United National:** 1. Ted DiBiase; 2. Michael Hayes; 3. David Von Erich; 4. Genichiro Tenryu  
**International jr:** 1. Chavo Guerrero; 2. Mighty Inoue  
**International tag:** 1. Giant Baba & Jumbo Tsuruta; 2. Tsuruta & Genichiro Tenryu  
**PWF tag:** 1. Bruiser Brody & Stan Hansen



It's time for more impartial observations on the barren wasteland (no relation to Baron Von Raschke) known as Twin Cities wrestling.

Since we last convened, the AWA 8/13 "All Steer" Wrestling card hit with a thud. The 5,600 casualties survived to tell about it, including a couple that provide the live Mondo-eye report. Mr. Mike's attendance was strictly forbidden by my psychoanalyst. As another step in the search for mental health, Mr. Mike has stopped watching the weekly overdose of WWF rustling. Only brief glimpses while dubbing the weekly mess and second-hand reports from less psychotic friends fill me in.

Of course the bombshell was Mean Gene Okerlund appearing as Hulk Hogan's partner on the 8/26 Wretched Wrestling Federation show. I can't believe it! Well, yes I can. The July show was so tepid (\$53,000 gate) that desperate measures are in order to perpetuate the myth of Hulk Hogan's drawing power. This fatuous farce packed 'em in, as I shuddered and suspected it would. It at least made some nice coin and enabled Vince to sign another superstar or pay the light bill, whichever was more pressing at the time. In the long run I can't see this as doing anything but damaging the credibility of the "new era" of wrestling, but does credibility matter? Of course not, it's "entertainment" we're talking about here.

If it's entertainment, I'd be prohibited from discussing the AWA 8/13 show however. So instead, the next hot topic is the return to WTBS of the Ole-Solie show. It was a brave effort put on by The Rock and The Rockhead. The first show on 7/28 was at the convenient time of 6:05 a.m. CDT (that's 4:05 a.m.--prime time for all you West Coast partiers). Unfortunately Mr. Mike missed the premiere, so I can only guess what sort of inane felicitations the Two Stooges employed in explaining, if they did, their "new surroundings."

Oddly enough, they use the Vince format which pissed everyone off, as their format as well. Instead of studio matches and interviews, Ole/Solie stand before a tacky NWA banner, banter a bit and intro taped matches from the Carolinas (some more than six months old).

Okay, let's get back to the recent AWA brainstorm. The tri-lateral commission has nothing to fear from the AWA braintrust, as this perpetration was one of the poorest and dumbest in recent memory (thank heaven for my recent memory loss).

Starting from the bottom, Steve Regal beat Tom Zenk, a Minnesota bodybuilder and Eddie Sharkey student. Zenk debuted locally in January on the ill-fated "USA pro wrestling" fiasco despite warnings that doing so would severely hurt his future. Zenk is a well-built, good-looking, totally inexperienced package. It's too early to evaluate his ability, even though he must think he's Ricky Martel the way he jumps around and tries to work up the crowd. Regal handled him fairly easily.

There's speculation that as Regal moves on (possibly before year's end) that Zenk will be the jr. (or is it light? If the AWA can't remember, how can I?) heavyweight champ. In the best news heard in months, Buck Zumhofe appears to be very content to stay in Texas, even to the point of annoying Verne, so if a follow-up to Regal is deemed necessary (why?), perhaps it will be Zenk. Not until he learns how to wrestle, however.

Brad Rheingans pinned Larry Zbyszko very smoothly and there was okay action when Zbyszko wasn't arguing with the ref. What I've said about Rheingans in the past still goes, even if Gagne, Inc. doesn't agree--as we'll soon see.

Billy Robinson vs. Curt Hennig 20 minute draw sounds on paper like a real "show stopper." Not so. This was an interesting match. It started with both shaking hands. Quite soon Billy started roughing things up. There seemed to be a genuine undercurrent of emotion in the ring, with the over-the-hill veteran looking to keep Curt in his place. Billy was a heel by match's end. It turned into a real battle, but still with wrestling. So what appeared to be a boring match had some interest, at least for me.

The tag match (Stan Lane & Blackjack Lanza vs. Mr. Saito & Nick Bockwinkel) was mainly fun. Lanza lost the fall (very nice of him, if indeed he "wrote" the ending) due to darn ol' Bobby Heenan slugging him from behind while Jack had Nick in the dreaded "brainbuster" (the old knuckles in the temples all younger siblings are familiar with). This had good action throughout, with Stan Lane looking especially good. In certain types of matches, Stan's a very entertaining performer. I'm getting to enjoy this guy.

Still, if Saito was allowed to wrestle "strong," he'd wipe the mat with virtually every AWA guy, with a couple of exceptions. Will we ever see it? Of course not. Still, I notice Saito has been getting title shots with champ Martel. These two going all-out would be the best possible match they could have involving Rick.

I could go on for pages criticizing about the main events, but I'll keep it brief.

Bruiser Brody vs Tony Atlas-Jim Brunzell handicap match: Anyone care to speculate on what kind of promotional advantage this match-up created. If Brody "lost," well gee, it was two-on-one. If he won, where does that leave Jim and Tony? What sense can it make to then build up Jim and Tony for anything let alone a feud with Brody? If they are to "turn" Brody soon it might make some sense, but the AWA will be lucky enough to keep Brody as a heel. Brody thought it was a stupid idea, but went along with it at the Gagnes' insistence. Of course, Brody won't lose a fall, and per above, how can they have him win. The only result, of course, is some kind of screw job, which coincidentally it was. Sheik Kaisey interfered of course, throwing some white powder (I hear there's a lot of it around wrestling these days, but this is totally out of hand!) on Jim. The ref didn't see it, but still called the DQ on Brody. If the ref doesn't have to see things to call 'em, what's next for wrestling?



The aftermath saves the whole dumb idea and provided the thrill of the night. After the bell, Brody straddled Jim on the top rope, leaving Jim on the floor. I'm not sure where Tony was, probably scuffling with Kaissey. Who comes in to restore order, none other than--Wally Karbo (Hey Wally, how come you don't have your glasses on?).

Brody then proceeds to rip off Wally's shirt, tear to shreds his undershirt and generally shoves Wally around like he was a common criminal or something. Brody barks and stomps, then leaves the ring leaving a "stunned" Wally to stagger around a bit (Oh, that's why you don't have your glasses on).

I'll bet you can't guess what's next. Yup, Wally "suspended Brody for good" (or until he comes back from Japan, whichever comes first). He suspended Sheik as well, but that suspension didn't take effect until Sheik wrestled a few more dates and the thing was shown on TV. For the record, Wally had possibly the best tan of the night.

Mr. Mike knows the real scheme here. It's so obvious. Not to be outdone by Gene Okerlund, Wally surely intends to team with someone and go after Brody. Now, I'd pay to see that! Maybe Greggie will be all healed by then to get his vowed vengeance. For that, I can wait.

In sum, it was a stupid, non-productive, not very entertaining idea made good by the Goodish man himself. Thank you, Bruiser Brody.

Prudent fans should leave at this point. The next match is too horrible to contemplate. Since Crusher & Baron vs. Road Warriors was booked all month, obviously the Roadies neither maimed nor beat the worst tag champ combo I've ever seen. Instead, the Roadies sold till it hurt, making (or trying to make) the champs look credible. Sorry, but there was no way. Can you imagine the self-restraint the Roadies had to show to keep from laughing at Crusher's punches? This smelled of a DQ screw job a mile away. In fact it ended a double DQ after some pitiful and intolerable non-action.

The poor crowd was no surprise since this was a dumb follow-up to the 7/15 card. Brody was wasted as noted and no matches seemed to advance anything. 9/9 was the next St. Paul card. Don't fret, the World champ Rick Martel was set to appear. The AWA abounds with top challengers (they told us so) so set to meet the champ will be... Brad Rheingans. There are certainly no Vulcans in Gagne, Inc. since the illogic of this is awesome. I don't care if it will be a good match (it likely will), the simple fact is this won't sell any tickets. The Roadies go against Brunzell and Steve O in a title defense. Everyone in the state of Minnesota knows who is going to get pinned there. Here's how Gagne, Inc. thinks they'll fill the building. There will be a six man tag--Heenan-Bockwinkel-Saito vs Lane-Keirn-Lanza. They've dragged out the Weasel suit again and if the heels lose, the audience selects which one must put on the suit. How (yawn) exciting. Also Harley Race (with his good friend Brody not on the card he'll actually probably show up) vs. Curt Hennig. This might become the St. Paul Civic Echo Chamber. I'm really beginning to wonder who is in charge here and how often do they let him out.

In the post-match interviews, Brody suggested they have a basketball match--five guys against Bruiser Brody; or a hockey match--six guys against BB; how about an NFL football match--11 guys against BB. See why we love this guy?

And we love Wally Caribou, too. Poor Wally, he's got nothing but grief --witness his recent interview:



"Now Ken, I've got something on my mind. I've been getting a lot of letters, a lot of phone calls and I'm getting blamed for something I have nothing to do with, and also the AWA. There's another organization in here and they've hired some of the help, and some of the wrestlers that couldn't hack it here and tried to make it look like they're part of an organization like the AWA. We have nothing to do with this organization, any shape, manner or form. And I want the people to know this: The greatest wrestling they'll see is the AWA...A, on Channel 9 at the St. Paul Civic Center."

Thank you Wally, master of syntax for that eloquent rebuttal...But what did you say? That you're being accused of promoting exciting matches and TV with marketable names?

The WWF show got a lot (a lot being a relative term) of local media attention. One station had Gene on camera on the local news. On Thursday prior to the show Vinnie via telephone hook-up was on a local radio Sports call-in show. Think of TNT with more static and you get the idea. Vinnie claimed promoting decision were made "by a committee." Har, har--that's a good one, Junior.

I missed the freak show, but some maladjusted Mondo Mat Morons were there, so I have enough details to sicken us all.

Who's the WWF's biggest draw? It must make one think when it turns out to be not Hulk Hogan, but a mid-40ish former radio DJ, TV time salesman and current ad agency VP, local roastmaster and journalist (?). In what surely was a desperation move, the brilliant idea was conceived to engage the roly-poly looking one in a tag team match with that incredible draw, Hulk Hogan.

It worked, sort of. The crowd was a strong 11-12,000, slightly better than the June debut show but nowhere near a sellout. That Hulk sure packs 'em in.

So how did Gene look? Not bad when one considers how little was expected of the announced 161-pound gladiator. Gene looked fit and though he can't be accused of having a physique, had confidence to wear rather brief black trunks instead of entire body tights as some assumed.

Hulk was in for most of the 10:21, but Geno gave the fans their due. He actually applied slaps, forearms and eye gouges (Hulk taught him his entire scientific repertoire). When the Animal Steele lumbered toward Gene, the Mean One, with professional timing, scooted between George's legs. As Hulk and Steele anted up near the ropes, Fuji attempted to throw salt (but Fuji, why are you standing in Gene's corner?) As he went for the pass, the throw was blocked by the ever-alert Gene. Hulk threw Fuji into the ropes and he came off into the foot of Gene. This wasn't well-timed, but Fuji acted stunned anyway and fell on his back. Hulk scooped Gene and threw him across Fuji's chest--Fuji had to grab onto Gene's trunks so he wouldn't slide off. 1-2-3 and we have the biggest mismatch victory since Crusher and Lord Littlebrook beat Hennig (that's Larry, Curt's daddy) and Race (that's the same Race, and yes, the same Crusher) in 1967. It was a thoroughly amusing farce.

The rest of the card--Orton 20 minute draw with Rocky Johnson (tho it went only 18 minutes)--not so great but Rocky continues to be appreciated. . . . Patera beat Terry Daniels with a fullnelson. Already Ken looks better than anytime during his 2½ year AWA stint. Daniels was less awful than usual. . . . Orndorff pinned Blair in 17:30 in the best action of the card. Paula held Blair's trunks and used ropes to win. Good antics throughout although it started rather slow. Starting slow and staying there was Richer pinning Moolah in an incredibly boring 8:30. Who cares! Adonis-Murdoch vs. Afa-"Samu" was a screw job win for the tag champs. Finally, Putzki-Ventura was a horrid 17:12 of no action. It wasn't a matter of rest holds, it was no holds, long and boring, ending with a double count out. It was the kind of match that makes one glad he didn't attend.

Next out 9/23 is Orton vs Rick McGraw, Piper vs. Jones, Studd vs. Bellomo, Shults vs. Junkyard Dog, Freebirds vs. Moondogs-Goulet, Santana vs. Orndorff, Hulk-Vachon vs. Ventura-Fuji. The fact that they couldn't sell out last time doesn't auger well. The crowd was mostly first-time curiosity seekers and they likely won't be back.

\*\*\*ROAD WARRIORS WIN AWA TAG TITLE from Crusher & Baron 8/25 in Las Vegas thus ending the wretched reign of the last-a-minute titlists. If this seems sudden it's because, perhaps:

\*\*\*VINNIE MAKES "SOLID" OFFER TO ROADIES -- COURTS SHARKEY TOO: The McMahon machine is actively after the Road Warriors and is reported to have offered them double their current AWA stipend (rumored to be \$200,000 per year each). The Roadies must seriously consider this. One very notable WWF champ told them "If you go with WWF now or later it won't matter. Everyone will be in the WWF eventually." Whether or not the wrestlers believe this gaga or not, they are privately willing to espouse such drivel. Vince has reportedly tried to lure Eddie Sharkey (Package deal with Roadies?) with a \$1,500 per week offer just to ref and train. Old co-hort Red Bastien is trying to convince Ed to check out the California scene. Can Ed possibly turn down Vinnie's jive-ass offer? \*\*\*ROGER KENT JOINS WWF AS SMALL TOWN TOUR CONTACT MAN: Another raid on Verne's front office as ageless Roger Kent, local radio personality, outstate 'rasslin promoter and all around arrogant asshole joins with Vince to engage in a similar

capacity. Two things come to mind. Is Roger another secret Gagne-hater ala Al DeRusha, and when will Vince give AWA fans a break and hire Rancid Ron Tronsguard? Ron wants to know as well.

\*\*\*SHARKEY GROWING DISSATISFIED WITH NEXT CAMP--ARE PROMISES BEING KEPT? In a related story, Ed Sharkey's involvement in Verne's training camps doesn't seem to be panning out. The next camp is about to start and Daddy Verne still must approve candidates and is insisting on Brad Rheingans to help coach. Ed's former stringent entrance qualifications (anyone with \$2-3,000) are ignored.

\*\*\*WORK CONTINUES ON VERNE'S FIRST METRODOME CARD--GOOD LUCK. Rumors continue that All-Star 'Rasslin will debut in the 55,000 seat Metrodome on Thanksgiving. Current promotional brainstorm still involves a Brody vs. Blackwell scenario but now a tag match with Brody & Kaissey vs. Blackwell and. . . Daddy Verne. Does the not-so-white knight really think his mere presence will sell the Dome? With less than three months to countdown and Brody gone most of that time, good luck on the build-up. Considering the AWAs finely honed promotional skills it sounds like suicide. Besides, won't Brody be starting the Japan tag tourney just before Thanksgiving?

\*\*\*THE BIGGEST RUMOR OF ALL BUILDS UP STEAM. A few issues back, I mentioned World Class would promote live up here, maybe as early as the fall. Well, it's getting cold at night and on-air promos for a card are to begin in the next few weeks. Is this for real? One can understand Fritz doing it out of pique considering the AWAs unbelievably senseless encroachment in Dallas. But, without the Freebirds, I can't see World Class sustaining its home turf let alone trying to build a national following. Their biggest problem is just trying to be a third entry into a rapidly-dwindling wrestling market. It doesn't sound smart. Still, their wrestling would be the best in the market. It will do one thing for sure--cause fans to salivate for the big attraction: Greg Gagne vs. Mike Von Erich in a "pose-down."

\*\*\*8/21 TNT A GEM: It contained numerous promos for live cards during the first week of August. Nice going, Vince. It makes not seeing Joe Blanchard make a fool of himself on national TV each week okay.

\*\*\*THE PILEDRIVER: A recent WWF video montage nicely showcased the inept Mad Dog Vachon and the worst piledriver in the sport today. Kudos to Moondog Rex, without whose cooperation the feeble Frenchman would still be trying to put on that most deadly of holds.

\*\*\*MEAN GENE TRAINING FILM: Now everyone's seen it via TNT. You gotta admit, it was great ("How 'bout a beer and a brat"). Where do they find the comedy writers to come up with this swill?

\*\*\*TYPICAL WWF: Jesse Ventura was scheduled on a radio sportstalk show 8/29. In true-WWF fashion, Jesse was a no-show.

## 1983 WRESTLING OBSERVER AWARDS

These are the results of the balloting of Observer readers. The points are determined by a 5-3-2 basis for first, second and third respectively. The votes in parenthesis are the number of first place mentions. I will also include my comments on each category along with several readers comments.

### WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

1. RIC FLAIR (43).....252
2. Hulk Hogan (18).....147
3. Tiger Mask (3).....57
4. Harley Race (3).....42
5. Jimmy Snuka.....36

Honorable mention: Bruiser Brody 33

My top three was the same as the consensus in that order. Throughout the year as World champ and in the Carolinas, Flair wrestled a killer schedule and still gave excellent bouts almost every night. As a combination

of a worker, technician, brawler, bleeder, interviewer and charismatic personality, I've never seen anyone better. Hogan is the #1 box office star in the business. He touched off a promotional revolution indirectly while ruining a tourney that had been hyped for two years (IWGP). His signing with McMahon may key the change of the wrestling world "as we know it." For impact, Hogan is No. 1, but Flair is better in the ring and did draw the biggest gate in history. Third pick was easy as Tiger was the biggest star ever in Japan, plus he made headlines throughout the year out of the ring with the assault problems of his cartoonist, the wedding that was put off by the promotion, the attempted change of identity, and his subsequent retirement, not to mention his unique style in the ring.





Left to Right: Isamu Teranishi, Animal Hamaguchi, Riki Choshu, Yoshiaki Yatsu and Kuniaki Kobayashi at press conference announcing their signing with Mr. Naoki Otsuka and leaving the NJWA

### THE JAPANESE REVOLUTION

Compiled from recent Japan reports (by "Unknown Correspondent")

The biggest explosion in Japanese wrestling history has taken place and New Japan Pro Wrestling and Antonio Inoki are facing an imminent crisis.

On 9/21, immediately after New Japan ended its last series, five wrestlers: Riki Choshu, Yoshiaki Yatsu, Animal Hamaguchi, Isamu Teranishi and Kuniaki Kobayashi broke away from Inoki and joined as executives and stockholders in Naoki Otsuka's promotion company. Four days later, five more wrestlers (Haruka Eigen, Masomobu Kurusu, Nobuo Honaga, Shinichi Nakano and Fumuhiko Niikura) followed them, although the latter five are not main-eventers. On 9/27 Killer Khan (Masashi Ozawa) suddenly returned from Dallas, Texas and joined Otsuka's company, as most had expected.

Without a doubt Giant Baba has been pulling the wires from behind and in the near future, probably November, the above 11 wrestlers will begin to work on All Japan Pro Wrestling cards as rivals of AJPW stars Jumbo Tsuruta, Genichiro Tenryu, etc.

The cause of this has been smoldering since last year. Seeing that Inoki spent too much on his reckless side business in Brazil, Otsuka and several other members of the NJPW hierarchy attempted a coup d'etat. They were temporarily successful, but Inoki managed to regain his President status of the company before long. Otsuka was forced to leave the company, however NJPW, fully aware of Otsuka's promotional skills, sub-contracted to Otsuka the promotional work to the company Otsuka subsequently formed.

Gradually the ambitious Otsuka became dissatisfied with his status and he dared to negotiate with Baba and AJPW. Baba, who had been playing second fiddle to Inoki both at the gate and on television, decided to work in partnership with Otsuka in June. They had their first joint card on 8/26.

This upset NJPW so much that they told Otsuka they would break off relations with him if he would continue to work with Baba. Otsuka, in return, told them he would file suit for damages. He was even bold enough to declare he would start a new promotion with the help of Baba. He went so far as to proclaim he would unify the Japanese mat world and bring about competition between all the top stars.

Otsuka said, "I will lure all the members from New Japan group except Inoki, (booker Seiji) Sakaguchi, Kantaro Hoshino and ex-wrestler (now TV color commentator and sometimes special ref) Kotetsu Yamamoto."

His long term goal is to establish a production company to employ wrestlers (and possibly singers and actors in the future) and his wrestlers will work exclusively within Baba's group.

NJPW, which had already lost quite a few top wrestlers to the UWF, took every measure to persuade Choshu and the other wrestlers to remain. They held a rare company party after the 9/20 Osaka show, the night they ended the last series. By this time, Choshu and Yatsu had already decided to leave New Japan for two months to work in the WWF territory and would return in late November for the annual tag team tournament. Sakaguchi had been promised by Vince McMahon that Choshu and Yatsu would become the top challengers for the WWF tag team title (that's a laugh if anyone believed that yarn).

At the party Sakaguchi asked Choshu if he and his compadres would jump to Otsuka's company and reportedly each of them said, "No." Right after the party they were approached by Otsuka and he persuaded them to change

their mind. The next morning Choshu and company went to Tokyo together and Otsuka held a press conference where he announced their joining his company.

Hearing this news, Sakaguchi said angrily, "I was deceived by those five racoon dogs."

The news was an incredible shock not only to New Japan but also to every wrestling fan. Newspapers and magazines wrote about the possibility of the collapse of New Japan. Many were surprised to realize the lengths Baba would go to get rid of his rival company. Baba, of course, pretended to be astonished to hear the news.

Baba even said if he were a wrestler of Inoki's, he would desert him, too. "Inoki lacks in ability as a manager and he has brought all this upon himself," Baba said about his long-standing enemy.

After fans learned all the wrestlers who had jumped, public attention was focused on Tatsumi Fujinami. Newspapers reported that Fujinami would soon desert Inoki and that NJPW was likely to close its career.

This conjecture came because just a few days before the explosion took place, Osamu Kido, persuaded by Karl Gotch, suddenly left NJPW to join the UWF. Kido, like Fujinami, was a real protege of Inoki since 1972, when Inoki was expelled from Japan Pro Wrestling Co. after failing his own coup d'etat the previous year. Kido's leaving made things known to the public how devastated Inoki's company really was and how uneasy wrestlers were about their future.

The rumor turned out to be false. Fujinami didn't jump and New Japan has at least temporarily survived.

Fujinami denounced Choshu and the others saying, "Money can't buy me." He also revealed Baba was eager to meet him and lure him to AJPW through Otsuka. "I know every side of Inoki, both good and bad," Fujinami said. "Choshu only saw his faults. I could see his good points."

# Pulling No Punches

Dave Meltzer, Sports Editor

## VALUE OF THE BELT

Cable TV and the overexposure of pro wrestling are now a fact of life. We can discuss the harmful and positive effects on wrestling both from a business and a fan standpoint, but saying when the current war-time situation ends that things will be back as they were in the early 70s just isn't so.

The day of the local fan in an area knowing only of his hometown promotion and not watching or caring about any other group is over. In most areas, with a cable hook-up, the average fan has his local promotion, the endless stream of WWF wrestling plus for those who are early risers or Ric Flair fans, the early morning Georgia show on WTBS.

In addition, in about half of the top markets in the country, the World Class TV show from Dallas is on. The last number I heard was that 51 markets now receive Dallas wrestling.

From a fan standpoint in San Francisco (I'm using S.F. as an example because its heavily wired into cable plus the Dallas show is syndicated on a cable station within the city and besides the WWF, has AWA which runs locally on television) a fan, with a good memory, has roughly 15 championships to contend with. This number compares with two titles a decade ago, when a local promotion was the only wrestling available in the area.

How many fans are going to remember 15 champions? This isn't to think about all the various contenders and even non-contenders which play a prominent role in the various promotions. If you consider the AWA, Georgia and Dallas promotions all having roughly a dozen wrestlers the promotion is trying to get as marketable stars, that's 36 wrestlers already. The WWF, on its own, has so many "names" I can't even attempt to count them all, but for argument's sake, let's figure another three dozen.

So fans now have roughly 70-80 wrestlers to decimate. Obviously most of the people will go unnoticed or easily forgotten. What will it take to be remembered? The obvious answer is a strong gimmick. That's not to say this is the only way, just the easiest way.

But just as the individual wrestlers will lose recognition and drawing power, so have and will the various champions.

In almost every city in the country the fans are familiar with both the N.W.A. and W.W.F. version of the World title. The A.W.A. champ is

known by the fans who read magazines (actually a very small percentage) and those in AWA cities.

To the casual fan Hulk Hogan, through physical presence alone, looks like a World champion. Forget the fact that in reality Hulk has little wrestling ability. Long-time fans of wrestling who know what to look for in a match will pretty much agree that Ric Flair is an exceptional wrestler and one worthy of labeled World champion. The drawing power of the WWF and NWA title matches, however much or little there is left, is mainly due to the holder of the belts, not the aura of the title itself. There are just too many belts floating around for fans to be concerned about an individual strap, whether it's billed as a U.S., International or World belt.

The casualty of the too many belts syndrome right now is the A.W.A. champ Rick Martel. If you take a glance at AWA attendance on shows with or without Martel you will see Martel and an AWA title match means very little on a card.

Part of the blame for this has to rest with the AWA, which apparently is under the impression that the belt itself insures a man's drawing power. This is another example of the AWA braintrust promoting in the 60s during the 80s. Since Martel won the title in May, very little has been done to get his name exposed. Nothing has been done to create a championship aura. This isn't a Flair or a Hogan who can create his own p.r. Martel is reasonably talented performer even if his "short high spots, long rest" style doesn't appeal to me. To make Martel and the AWA title mean something is going to take lots of work by the AWA, and they've done almost nothing.

It's pretty well assumed that Hogan will be WWF champion unless Hollywood calls, for the foreseeable future. However, the NWA could fall into the Martel mistake every bit as bad when the time comes to replace Flair.

There's a big obstacle here for Flair's replacement. No matter who it may be, he won't be able to live up to the standard Flair set. If you include all facets it takes to be great in the wrestling profession--ability, work rate, resiliency to jet-lag, interviews and the aura of a champ, Flair is the best performer I've seen in 15 years as a fan. Because a possible Flair replacement will have to compete head-up against Hogan in many cities, the champ will need impressive physical tools plus all the help he can get from the local promotion in instilling

that this wrestler is worthy of being World champ. It will be a big mistake if the new champ plays the same games as Flair, with regular TV losses and non-title losses. Because of his ability, Flair could get away with that a little. But even so, to the casual fan Flair's losing only makes Hogan look good in comparison. Losing a TV non-title match may hype the gate for the re-match, for one night. But this wrestling war isn't going to be won or lost in one night.

The summation is that as long as so much wrestling and so many different champions are shown to the casual fan, if the NWA, WWF or AWA think that just by putting a belt on someone they are creating a champion, then they are in for a rude awakening.

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# Pulling No Punches

Dave Meltzer, Sports Editor

20 / 20 V I S I O N

Poor Eddy Mansfield. All he did was tell the truth and now he lost his job.

Poor Jim Wilson. All he did was refuse to sleep with a homosexual wrestling promoter and boom, he was gone, blacklisted out of work. He lost his house and everything.

Poor John Stossell. All he did was confront a faker, say "I think it's all fake," and got his head slapped around.

At least that's what I would have thought if I watched 20/20, and knew nothing else about wrestling.

First off, I've got to make some comments about the major portion of the piece, where Mansfield demonstrates the moves, gets to gross out the public by carving up his forehead and says all matches are fixed.

All week ABC hyped the thing as a wrestler shows how they fake it. They needed something to get at least a few viewers from Hill Street Blues and Knots Landing, wrestling is a hot item now, so undoubtedly many are curious as to the things Mansfield showed. They didn't say they were going to investigate the wrestling business, although they did touch upon that in the report.

What can I say about Mansfield? What he told was basically the truth. It may have been better left unsaid. Some folks compared it to somebody demonstrating how magic tricks are faked. But good or bad, it won't affect wrestling in the least. The vast majority of fans who attend knew most of what Mansfield disclosed, except the razor blades to the forehead (the majority still believe they use blood capsules or the instances with blood indicate a transition from fake to real).

However, Mansfield didn't lose his job because he went to ABC-TV and said he'd show them how he fakes it. He lost his job because he didn't show up for work. On more than one occasion, Mansfield worked for promotions and walked out on dates, leaving no messages nor forwarding address. If you did that in your job, would you lose it? If you did it two or three times would you likely get a job in the same field?

Granted, Mansfield's pay as a wrestler wasn't always great. Some of the things he was asked to do weren't always pleasant. That's the price you pay for being in the entertainment business. There are

thousands of starving artists for every one that makes big money, whether in music, wrestling (see there is a connection) or acting. Some changes may even be beneficial, but I don't feel sorry for Mansfield.

Who doesn't know the name of the homosexual promoter Wilson referred to? I don't doubt he was solicited, but he wasn't kicked out of wrestling for resisting amorous advances.

Wilson was a terrible wrestler who refused to lose matches. You've got to be awfully good to get away with refusing to lose in this business, and Wilson wasn't.

I was contacted by Stossell in late January, just a few days before the New York hearing where David Shults was suspended. I was left with a very bad impression because I knew right then that while real vs. phony was his main issue, he was interested in the monopoly issue. But while interested, he hadn't done any research on it except for what our friends Mr. Mansfield and Mr. Wilson told him. They didn't let him know there was a promotional war going on. With two sides competing so fiercely (well, one side is competing fiercely, the other side would like to but has yet to make effective moves) how can there be a monopoly?

"I talked with Hulk Hogan a little," Stossell told me. "He's the best wrestler isn't he."

After gagging silently, I replied that I don't think Hogan is nearly the best. The consensus view of those I talk with is the best wrestler is Ric Flair.

"Who's Ric Flair. If he's so good why wasn't he at Madison Square Garden."

Remember, this guy had been "investigating" wrestling full-time for three months now. Anyway, the conversation deteriorated from there.

Stossell's closing comment to Barbara Walters after the thing with Shults was shown, about the majority of these guys just working hard to make a living was the only thing I said in our conversation that he recalled, which is just as well.

If someone went up to 50 journalists and told them one-by-one that their profession is fake and they were nothing but phonies, I'd bet one of them would get violent. The rest would want to get violent but common sense would prevent it--just like why the other wrestlers didn't attack Stossell.

Actually the only part of the report that indicated sloppy journalism as opposed to shallow journalism was when McMahon denied the W.W.F. has ever done anything to keep competitors out of buildings. I was watching for his nose to grow at the time. The obvious next step, at least to me, is to find out why no other promoter except for a member of the McMahon family has been able to book Madison Square Garden for a wrestling show the past several decades. The lie should have been obvious, and confronted with such, I'd have done everything possible to hang him by his quotes. Nope, subject was dropped.

All in all I felt the piece was shallow, but entertaining. The MTV show a few nights earlier had ten times the effect, both positive and negative, as the 20/20 piece, even if the latter was viewed by tons more people.

And believe me, in many ways journalism is more fake than wrestling. Wrestling has no illusions that the general public takes seriously. Journalists often report on things they know nothing about. They come to a conclusion based on limited research, and too many people take what they report seriously.

Think about it--how many subjects that you know a lot about, be it wrestling, or anything else, do you hear a reporter talk or write about the subject and you laugh, because more than half of the facts are wrong. How many times do you read a report on a subject like that and say to yourself, that reporter did one hell of a job (like I said to myself reading the Philadelphia Daily News series reprinted here last month). It's the former the vast majority of the time, isn't it?

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This can't be accepted at face value, because Fujinami was one of those who attempted the coup d'etat last year. In addition, after his 2/3 bout in Sapporo where Yoshiaki Fujiwara attacked Choshu and beat him with a stick before Choshu's scheduled match with Fujinami, apparently unknown to Fujinami, he got angry. The plot and said he would leave a company which would allow this type of thing.

Fujinami may have thought that wrestling on the "babyface" side, he would be unable to surpass Tsuruta, or even Tenryu had he joined AJPW.

Fujinami was already an executive in New Japan, and because of this, was going to succeed Inoki and the top star in the near future. This may have been part of the reason Choshu himself left. Choshu was apparently against the seniority system and realized that Fujinami, and not himself, would be Inoki's replacement on top.

Fujinami's attitude certainly pleased the multitude of NJPW fans, who were in genuine fear of the group going bankrupt both financially and talent-wise. If Fujinami had switched, it would have killed New Japan. It isn't clear whether Otsuka thought he could lure Fujinami to his group, but if he had, it was the only miscalculation he and Baba made.

According to magazine reports, Otsuka and Baba spent in the neighborhood of \$1.5 million to lure the 11 wrestlers. It was Nippon TV, Baba's parent company, which supported them financially. Nippon will have to pay a lot more, because most of the 11 had signed contracts with Asashi-TV that are valid until March 1986. Otsuka is said to have met with the head of the Asahi-TV network and asked them to replace Inoki's show or start up a new television show with the wrestlers he had signed. He was refused.

TV Asahi will file suit for damages caused by the jumping of the 11 wrestlers and Nippon TV will settle it by paying through the nose, as the UWF did recently paying \$30,000 in the case of Fujiwara and Nobuhiko Takada.

The Asahi network will continue to support NJPW. On New Japan's 9/28 television show, the ending of the 9/18 match between Choshu's trio and Inoki's trio (won by Choshu's trio) was cut off and an interview with Inoki was put in its place. Inoki said he was used to such a crisis and his group would overcome the situation.

Inoki had a similar crisis in 1966 when he founded in vain Tokyo Pro Wrestling Company with Toyonobori; again in 1971 when he was expelled from Japan Pro Wrestling Co. after failing to succeed in a coup d'etat; and again in 1976 when he and Hisashi Shinma got into financial trouble because of repercussions stemming from the Inoki vs Muhammad Ali fight. Inoki thus far has been lucky enough to get over each crisis and obtained greater success each time. What about this time?

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## Pulling No Punches

Dave Meltzer, Sports Editor

### MCMAHON BUYS GEORGIA WRESTLING

Professional wrestling has now been put in the same boat as other professional athletics in that the most important decisions will be made not within the business, but within the court system.

Every day we read about court decisions affecting other sports-- Can professional athletes compete in the so-called "amateur" olympics? Can an owner move his team to a new city without league approval? Can a commissioner suspend a player convicted on drug charges without having it over turned and his power usurped?

In pro wrestling, where is the line drawn between expansion and furthering competition and attempted monopolistic practices and has Titan Sports passed that line.

In one of the biggest bombshells to hit wrestling in some time, Titan Sports has bought out Jack and Jerry Brisco, major shareholders in Georgia Championship Wrestling, Inc. The Briscos percentage plus the sizeable percentage controlled by current Titan Sports employee Jim Barnett gives McMahon more than 50 percent of the Georgia stock, thus a controlling share.

There was no doubt that Georgia wrestling, and more particularly Ole Anderson, were perhaps the biggest thorn in McMahon's side. Both groups were dealing evenly, dividing up the loyalty of fans in Ohio. More recently the Georgia group promoted two very successful shows in Baltimore and winning over a lot of fans in one of Titan's major markets in the process. Anderson and Georgia along with Jim Crockett promotions were about to promote a major card right in the heart of McMahon country, at New Jersey's Meadowlands.

Not only that, but the not so sly, subtle and derogatory remarks

and films shown several times on Georgia wrestling always concerned various WWF talent.

When informed of what happened, apparently Ole Anderson has gotten a restraining order preventing a McMahon take-over. Whether McMahon can overturn that order before the end of the month will determine whether Georgia's upcoming shows in Baltimore and the threatened "17 city world wide tour" ever take place. There is a chance that even the Meadowlands show could be in jeopardy of the order is overturned.

Many incorporated business have in their charter if any shareholders sell, that sale must be approved by the remainder of shareholders, or at least the remainder will get the chance to meet the purchasing price and retain their share. Whether that provision is in the GCW charter could determine the outcome of this case.

Another factor is the attitude of the judge and jury toward anti-trust. Anti-trust laws, which I have virtually no knowledge of, were not written with a business like wrestling in mind. The technical application may or may not be good for the wrestling business and what may seem like the "just" decision for those of us who have a basic understanding of the wrestling business may not be the legal "just" decision.

As anyone who watches the legal system work, most likely this is a case which will take several months, maybe even years to be decided. But if one Saturday afternoon you tune in and see Mean Gene and Jr. McMahon instead of the Ole/Solie show, you'll know why.

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# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

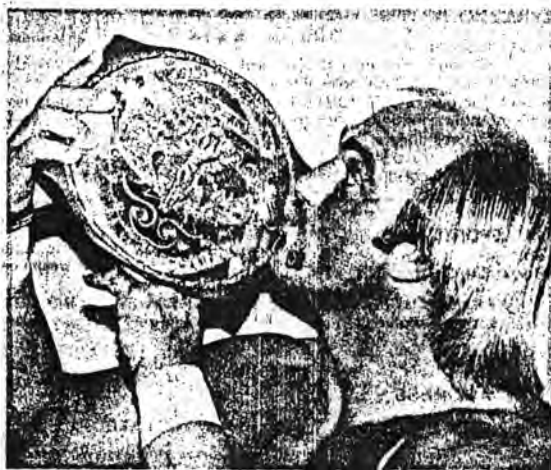


R.I.P. JULY 14, 1984 "IT WAS NICE,"  
"BLACK SATURDAY"

OLE ANDERSON'S LAST FLASCO. CABLE  
WRESTLING HITS NEW LOW. MR. MIKE ALMOST  
GIVES IT UP, BUT... IS THERE NEW A.W.A. HOPE? (DETAILS  
INSIDE)

## WWF OUT-DOES THE AWA AGAIN!

VERNE ON SHORT END OF ANOTHER WWF SIGNING COUP  
IN A TRUE BOMBSHELL SHELL MOVE, THE <sup>WWF</sup> SIGNED BOBO BRAZIL, "THE LEGEND,"  
TO A SERIES OF EXCLUSIVE CONTRACTS (SAID TO BE FOR AS MANY AS 3 APPEARANCES)  
BEGINNING WITH THE MAY MSG CARD HOW AND WHY VERNE GAG-ME MISSED  
SIGNING THIS PRIME AWA BEEF REMAINS A MYSTERY. IF THE WWF CONTINUES  
TO SIGN INCREDIBLY PAST-THEIR-PRIME OVER THE HILL 'RASSLERS, WHO'LL BE LEFT  
FOR THE AWA? THANKFULLY, WE STILL HAVE REG LISOWSKI!



Hulk Hogan loves his championship belt. So much so that he had it surgically  
ATTACHED TO HIS LIPS. NOW THE HULKSTER CAN BE HEARD SAYING  
"HUKKUHMMOURRA IS RMANGE WWLLODD!" INDEED!

## UNFOUNDED RUMOR DEPT. (THE BEST KIND.)

A FEW OF THE WRESTLERS AT  
THE WWF 6-17 TWIN CITIES  
DEBUT CARD WERE TAKING  
SARDONIC DELIGHT IN THE FACT  
THAT "HUCK" HOGAN COULDN'T  
EVEN MUSTER A SELL-OUT  
FOR HIS "RETURN HOME" \*

THE WWF IS TALKING TO NONE  
OTHER THAN NICK BOCKWINKLE  
AND HIS MANAGER BOBBY "THE  
BRAIN" HEENAN. PERHAPS THEY  
TOO WISH TO JOIN THE MAJOR LEAGUES.  
\*

IN FACT, IT'S RUMORED VINNIE  
WOULD TALK TO VERNE'S WIFE  
IF THERE WAS A PROMOTIONAL ADVAN-  
TAGE IN IT. \*



~~MR. MACE'S~~  
**MR. VINCE'S**

GOOD EVENING, LADIES  
AND GENTLEMEN, AND  
WELCOME TO THE  
WORST WRESTLING  
FEDERATION, WHICH  
HAS JUST TAKEN OVER...

**MOMO**  
**WRESTLING**

~~WRESTLING~~  
~~OBSERVER~~

OCTOBER 22, 1984

\$2.50

HELLO, EVERYBODY. THIS  
IS VINCENT K. McMADMAN,  
INDEED PERHAPS YOU MIGHT  
SAY, THE MEGALOMANIAC  
RESPONSIBLE FOR RUINING  
WRESTLERS AND WRESTLING!  
THAT IS TOTALLY AWESOME!

WITHOUT A DOUBT, I AM  
MAKING PROFESSIONAL  
WRESTLING MAJOR LEAGUE!  
AND I'M DOING IT BY USING  
WRESTLING'S TRADITIONAL  
STRENGTH--POOR TASTE!  
IN FACT, MY VACUOUSNESS  
IS HUGE AND GIANT LIKE!

SINCE I WANT TO OWN  
EVERYTHING, INCLUDING  
THE PREMIERE FANZINE

..... LET'S  
TAKE YOU NOW TO A  
MATCH UP BETWEEN  
MYSELF AND THE REST  
OF THE WORLD. OH MY!

NOT WITHSTANDING THE FACT THAT I DRONE  
ON INCESSANTLY AND I'M IN LOVE WITH MY FACE!  
WHY ELSE WOULD I PARADE THE VINNIE VINNIE IN EVERY  
FORGETTABLE INSTANCES? THE WAY I, FORTUNATELY, YOU'VE  
GOT TO BE KIDDING! AND DON'T YOU LOVE THE WAY I'M  
RE-WRITING HISTORY AS EVERYTHING IS WWF RELATED. AND.....



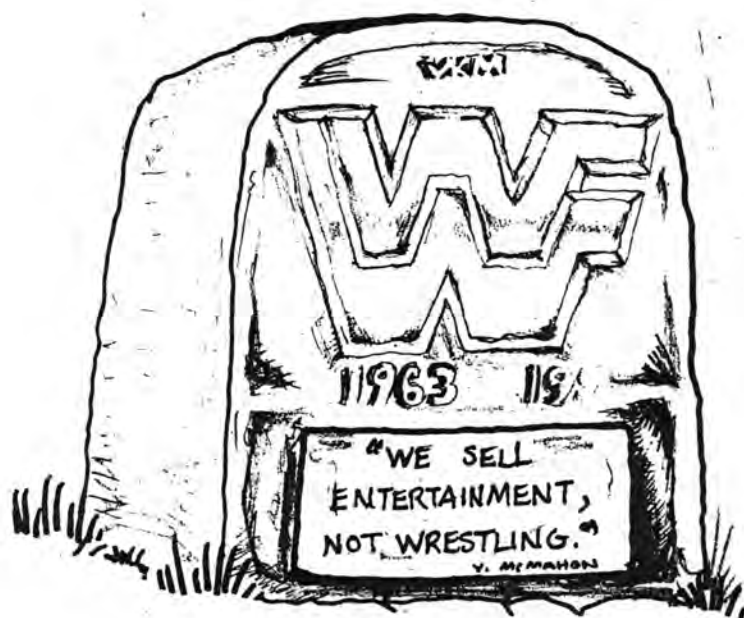
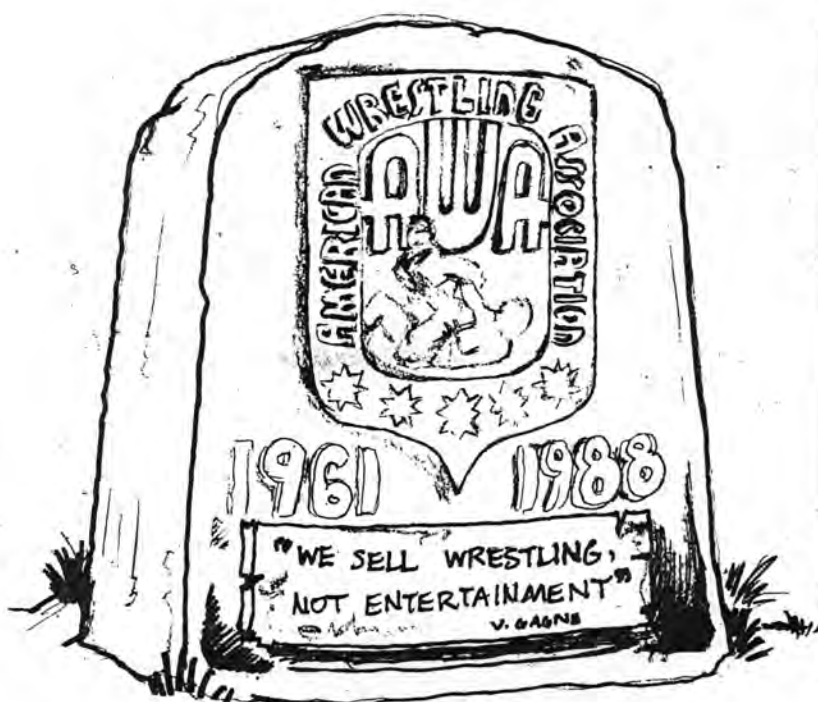
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We have to admit admiration at the marketing skills of Vince McMahon. The Hogan vs. Piper match was stereocast via MTV this past week. It was great.

It's not "wrestling," but it sure looks like it. To the unfamiliar, it had to look like solid fun. Will it soon be "cool" to be a fan of this thing closely resembling wrestling? No doubt wrestling is close to being a genuine fad. After all, have you caught all the stuff--Vince on the David Letterman show, the spoof on TNT on Saturday Night Live, the wrestling gag on Hill Street Blues, or the 2/7 Night Court episode with all the standard references to script, blood, etc.

Two things are apparent. Vince has NBC hooked. Some network stuff will result. Second, they're creating a market for the stuff when they get around to showing it. A not very subtle psychological conditioning is being foisted upon us. We're supposed to believe wrestling is now "hip" entertainment that people are aware of, and is acceptable and available. Now, will it work?

As we said, the show came off great, probably as hoped for and better than expected. It's funny, in 1984 the WWF couldn't convince actual wrestling fans in most new individual markets that their stuff was any good. So many cards came off worse than their "game plan" had budgeted. To correct this, the WWF has and will convince TV programmers and advertisers, the important people, that their stuff is popular because it is so in New York. Oddly enough, through chutzpah, guile, savvy, intelligence and mental illness, they're pulling it off. Much is being written about wrestling, with no thought to its long-term future.





**MID ATLANTIC WRESTLING PRESENTS**

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CAGE MATCH**  
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RACE FOR THE  
WORLD'S  
HEAVYWEIGHT  
CHAMPIONSHIP

**WORLD  
TAG TEAM  
CHAMPIONSHIP**  
JACK BRISCO VS RICKY STEAMBOAT  
JERRY BRISCO VS JAY YOUNGBLOOD  
SPECIAL REFEREE A. MOSCA

**SPECIAL  
COLLAR  
MATCH**  
RODDY PIPER VS GREG VALENTINE

---

**CHARLIE BROWN VS KABUKI  
MASK VS NWA TV TITLE  
PLUS  
MORE SINGLE AND TAG TEAM MATCHES!**

**Tickets Available At:**  
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and  
Spartanburg Memorial Auditorium  
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## 1984 MONDO ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS!

MMMW SALUTES SOME OF THE MORE  
VISIBLE (AND MISERABLE) FACES OF '84



## LEADING NEWS STORIES OF 1987

The year 1987 may be remembered in wrestling history for the incredible success story of Wrestlemania III and the year in which the wrestling war moved away from the arena and into the pay-per-view industry.

But, Wrestlemania aside, 1987 was not a good year for the wrestling business. The inevitable fallout that had long been predicted when wrestling, coming off the boom of 1983 went into the promotional wars and daily hot-shotting over the next few years, came to the fore. With the exception of the WWF, which has so many sources of outside marketing income, this past year couldn't be considered an economic success by any of the U.S. promotions.

The fall of the NWA after the UWF purchase may have been the biggest story of the year, but the bottom line is, when 1986 began, we had "the big five" promotions. World Class and the AWA dropped off the list and 1987 gave us "the big three." The UWF is now history and the NWA may very well no longer be competition as well. Clearly Titan Sports controls professional wrestling in the United States, and no doubt will attempt to springboard their domination into several international markets before the end of the decade.

Hulk Hogan remains the biggest name in the business, with his legend growing by virtue of beating Andre the Giant at Wrestlemania III. However, even Hogan can no longer guarantee a sellout crowd, or even fill buildings on a consistent basis. However, Titan's television is not only well-viewed in North America, but it has spread to a few South American countries, Titan made its first European tour in late October and there is also considerable interest in Vince McMahon's mutation of sport in both the Middle East and Australia.

From the Titan standpoint, the big shows, Wrestlemania and the Survivors Series, were unqualified successes. Television ratings, the most accurate indicator of interest in the product, actually increased. Saturday Night's Main Event is one of the success stories of television, with a prime-time network special forthcoming. The syndicated package ranks among the strongest in the entire television industry. Marketing income is harder to judge. The record album has to be categorized as at least a minor failure. The doll market dried up. And the ice cream bars melted. House shows were good, but there are some tell-tale signs, such as cutting back from three shows to two shows per night and pay-offs dropping between 15 and 20 percent across the board that say things aren't as rosy as folks would like you to believe.

But they are certainly rosier for Titan than anyone else. Crockett's year, by and large, has to be considered a disaster. The ad revenue expected from acquiring the UWF television network didn't materialize. Titan's maneuvering killed their first pay-per-view attempt. Houses hit rock bottom after a successful July tour. And while JCP will surely achieve some success early in 1987 with Lex Luger vs. Ric Flair confrontations, the long-term prognosis is uncertain at best. And if that sounds bad. . .

The UWF didn't even last until the summer before bailing out. Championship Wrestling from Florida needed Crockett's help in the spring. Fritz Von Erich sold out his stock in the World Class office. Continental spent most of the year looking for buyers, who kept bailing out. International Wrestling in Montreal was done in by McMahon. New Japan, despite its tremendous talent pool, ended the year facing an imminent crisis. Jerry Jarrett's CWA, while having occasional good nights, has the bad ones outnumber the good ones by a wide enough margin that the entire territory is only averaging \$30,000 per week and paychecks are embarrassingly low. And Jarrett's figures would make Bob Geigel and his wrestlers envious, and the AWA, well, you know the story.

Stampede Wrestling finished the year with success on a regional level and has talked of expanding, but will McMahon let them be if they get big enough to be competition? Hardly. Even Giant Baba's All Japan, probably the most consistently and steadily successful group around, faces some problems, most notably that every major star that works for them, save Terry Gordy, is getting up in years. And Baba is looking to expand into the United States in 1988, and it'll require a whole lot of capital and a whole lot of good advisers to get that off the ground. The Japanese women? A different ball game than the rest. They are more dependent upon one girl (Chigusa Nagayo) that at any time during recent years and they play an awfully rough game with frequent injuries. With Chigusa healthy, they are assured of steady business, although they'll have to emerge with a new teenage pop idol to bring houses to "boom period" levels.

What does 1988 have in store? Success for Titan Sports is inevitable. Pay-per-view becoming a bigger factor is as well. House shows going down seems to be the trend. Television's interest in wrestling besides Titan--not too promising although that probably depends more on the economics within the TV industry than within the wrestling industry.

And what of the hoped for resurgence of the small promotions? Lots of new ones seem to be opening up. Jerry Blackwell wants to run full-time in Georgia. Global in Florida is planning on weekly shows in many cities. Buzz Sawyer is talking of opening up a California circuit. Continental is splitting in two. Others are on the way.

The answer to that one is twofold. First off, as major offices and drawing six-figure gates, of course not. But as regional outfits running small shows and staying away from Titan's markets, I believe a well-run one with the right talent and the right booking and with enough money behind it and with a slickly done television show does have a chance.



At least, I sure hope it does.

In balloting, from an impromptu editorial board of the Observer, we've chosen the 10 biggest news stories of the past year, which should help everyone recall some of the key events of the year.

#### 1. JIM CROCKETT PURCHASES THE UNIVERSAL WRESTLING FEDERATION

Last year, the second biggest news story was the Universal Wrestling Federation's attempt to become the third national promotion. This year's lead story is its failure.

With the exception of Vince McMahon's initiation of the wrestling was and its early stages, no story has been the subject of more controversy and conjecture and even rumors than this one.

The bottom line is, while the UWF had its core of fans and some strong television ratings and some of the best actual wrestling to be found anywhere, it wasn't making it as the house shows. Crowds were bad. Lots of finger-pointing was going on. Tempers were short. Fears were high. Morale was low.

In March, the first stages of national touring took place with road shows in California, Chicago, Georgia and Minneapolis. With the exception of a \$72,000 house at the Omni in Atlanta, the shows weren't profitable. The home area, states like Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Arkansas, were devastated economically by the collapse of the oil industry. Unemployment was high and purchasing tickets to wrestling matches wasn't high on people's list of things to do with their limited income.

A lot of people have said a lot of things about Bill Watts over the years. But one thing nobody says is that he's not a schrewd businessman. Watts realized a year earlier that in the long run, regional promotions were like dinosaurs, soon to be extinct, or so he thought. For survival he felt the need to go national, although he had reservations about what that would entail.

Ken Mantell was hired on as booker and lots of new stars were brought in. Jim Ross was assigned to expand the television syndication and soon UWF had expanded from something like 15 markets to more than 100. So wrestlers wouldn't flee to Titan after they'd been pushed to the top, as Watts' leading drawing card of years past, the Junkyard Dog had, they were signed to contracts ranging from \$75,000 to more than \$150,000 per year for two-year periods.

Lots of rumors have spread in the wake of the UWF demise, perhaps some of them are true. But the reality of the oil industry and local economy collapse with no turnaround in sight, combined with being understaffed to go national, and with the fact they'd spent a year pushing Jim Duggan as the lead star and he was now with Titan, and others things as well spelled the end of the UWF.

Whether Jim Crockett were to have bought them out or not, the UWF wouldn't have lasted through the summer. The wrestlers all would have been out of work and Crockett could have had his pick of the best ones anyway. However, a sale was arranged in early April, for \$4 million, to be paid to Watts over a 10-year period.

What Crockett was buying, mainly, was the TV network; a few key front office personnel, a few building leases, an office in Dallas and several talented wrestlers just came along as part of the bargain.

The lure was potential TV ad revenue. Titan Sports was generating between \$10 and \$15 million annually from its TV syndication package. Crockett, who had national exposure through WTBS, but his syndication package was only in around 60 markets, wasn't generating a dime. By combining the UWF and NWA networks, the combined exposure would approach both the exposure level and TV ratings to near-Titan levels.

The Wrestling Network was born, but by the end of the year, it was in a shambles. Now it is premature to write off TWN, but its prospects sure looked a whole lot brighter back in April. TWN debuted in the top 10 of all syndicated networks in the country, and peaked at No. 5 during the summer. It's gone downhill ever since, to the point where TV shoots have been cutback, production budgets lowered, ratings have plummeted and shows are now duplicated and the main show of the package, the UWF program, has been discontinued. During one two-month period, the ratings fell nearly 45 percent and the network dropped completely out of the top 15 in syndication and has yet to recover. One week, the week after Ron Garvin beat Ric Flair to win the NWA title, TV viewership dropped 25 percent, and those viewers never came back.

With its biggest show of the year approaching, Starcade, TWN was at its weakest point. When Vince McMahon's plan to sabotage the pay-per-view of the show worked better than anyone could expect, there were genuine fears about Starcade being a total flop. As it was, all things considered, it appears Starcade was at least a passable success, but it was by no means anywhere near what was predicted for it months earlier.

The former UWF wrestlers, and the UWF itself, suffered a fate every bit as bad as the now-defunct UWF television show. The wrestlers themselves somehow got caught up in NWA vs. UWF rhetoric, which caused a great deal of friction for several months. "Stepchildren" was the word used by the UWF wrestlers to explain their position in the new Crockett family.

Most of the key points have been reported to death with Dusty Rhodes as booker taking a lot of heat for it. Dusty did instill immediately Big Bubba



Rogers, an improving but still somewhat green 350 pounder who had done jobs for almost every NWA babyface, as UWF champion. He then sent Brad Armstrong & Tim Horner, never perceived of by fans as legitimate title threats in the NWA, over to win the tag team titles. The psychological message was clear. The NWA was superior. When joint cards were held, even in UWF cities, it was the NWA wrestlers who worked the main event matches with the UWF guys, even their champion Bubba, relegated to middle or low spots on the card in most cases.

The UWF shows turned into NWA-style squash match shows, which ultimately destroyed their ratings. When it was finally decided to do away with the UWF as a circuit, the leftover stars that were retained never were put in the thick of the NWA angles. At Starcade, the UWF title was the second match on the card. The promotion for the unification of the TV titles was such to point out to every fan, the superiority of the NWA. Instead of building hype for a merger of two great alliances, the NWA folks, in their attempts to show alliance superiority, destroyed their "stepchild" organization.

Eight months after officially taking over the UWF, whatever they took over is gone. What at one point appeared to be the key to Crockett finally achieving a strong competitive position to Titan, instead was the catalyst for Crockett falling to the position where he was no competition.

## 2. WRESTLEMANIA GROSSES \$17.1 MILLION - DRAWS 90,000 LIVE - ANDRE GETS PINNED

March 29, 1987 was the day that Vince McMahon finally proved what he had been claiming all along, that he was a promotional genius.

The facts speak for themselves. The largest pay-per-view audience in the history of the industry, some 520,000 paying \$10.3 million, bettering the audience and dollar gross of every major boxing title fight of recent years. A paid attendance of 90,873 at the Silverdome in Pontiac, Michigan, the largest indoor gathering for any entertainment event in the history of the world--sports or otherwise. An atmosphere equivalent to a Super Bowl, and without the media building it up for you. In Wrestlemania I, Vince used the media hype to make him a success. In Wrestlemania II, without the hype, he couldn't pull it off. In Wrestlemania III, he put together the biggest show on Earth, and he did it by himself.

The two-and-a-half hour Sunday afternoon presentation came off almost flawless. While the main event, Hulk Hogan vs. Andre the Giant, which drew this huge gate, was by no means the greatest match of all-time--in fact, it was one of the worst big main events in history. McMahon managed to remove the stench of the poor work rate by giving the fans the two things they came to see, Andre getting slammed and Andre getting pinned. With cleverly planted hype and lies, fans believed Andre, billed as 7-foot-5 and 525 pounds (in reality Andre is closer to 6-foot-10) and larger-than-life, had not only never been slammed (which actually was a semi-frequent occurrence), but had never been pinned (which had happened, but was a rarity). Hogan faced the ultimate babyface challenge of all-time, fighting the ultimate unbeatable monster heel.

And those wanting good matches were satisfied by the second most-hyped bout on the show, the Intercontinental title match with champion Randy Savage dropping the strap to Ricky Steamboat. The bout was named Match of the Year in almost every mat publication; and was certainly the best match the WWF had ever presented in the "new era."

The remainder of the card was certainly forgettable for the most part. None of the other bouts went longer than nine minutes. While there was lots of heat to Roddy Piper's retirement match, a hair vs. hair encounter with Adrian Adonis, complete with the razor not working for Brutus Beefcake's initial stint as "The Barber," and the action was lots of fun, it was still a six-minute match.

Other matches, like Butch Reed's win over Koko Ware, Junkfood Dog's performance against Harley Race, and a 6-man match involving four midgets, or the Killer Zzzzs vs. Nikolai Volkoff & Iron Sheik to set up Jim Duggan's aborted feud with foreign menaces, were vivid reminders that despite its promotional superiority, that the WWF was clearly not the best wrestling around.

## 3. RIKI CHOSHU AND FRIENDS LEAVE ALL JAPAN FOR NEW JAPAN

In Japanese, the word "Riki" means "King of." If that's the case, "Choshu" should mean, "controversy."

Three years ago, Riki Choshu, then the most-popular and biggest drawing card in Japanese wrestling, jumped, along with a dozen others, from Antonio Inoki's New Japan promotion to Shohei Baba's All Japan promotion.

At the time wrestling in Japan had never been hotter, yet the jump was such a severe blow than many newspapers predicted the folding of Inoki's outfit. And it really was that close--one wrestler--Tatsumi Fujinami, stood in the way of the extinction of the vaunted New Japan group, the group which brought more talented workers into the profession in the last decade than almost all others combined. All eyes were on Fujinami, if he had jumped, the TV network would have dropped Inoki's show, and he'd have been out of business. But as always, Inoki survived.

With Choshu on board, All Japan became the hot circuit in Japan. The work-rate, since most of the wrestlers Choshu brought with him like Masa Saito, Yoshiaki Yatsu, Animal Hamaguchi, Kuniaki Kobayashi, Super Strong Machine, Hiro Saito and even hard-working prelim boys like Fumihiro Niikura and Isamu Teranishi, was of top calibre. Several of the All Japan wrestlers, most notably Genichiro Tenryu, responded to the challenge, improved their wrestling as well, and gave All Japan the best action in the world.



The public could accept Choshu leaving. Inoki's troubles had been well-known to the public from Satoru Sayama's departure from wrestling, and several of Inoki's best younger wrestlers (Akira Maeda, Nobuhiko Takada, etc.) had already left earlier in the year to form the UWF. Also, Choshu was to become president of his own promotional company and promote cards on his own. He had achieved the Japanese dream, being the first of the "new generation" to achieve status of Baba and Inoki.

By the end of 1986, the Choshu story became almost a weekly soap opera. First came the word that if Hiroshi Wajima, a legendary name in sumo wrestling that Baba was bringing in--someone whose name recognition among the Japanese public even exceeded that of Choshu--were to be pushed while not having talent, that Choshu would leave. At the same time, no matter how good Choshu's matches with All Japan were, and generally they were very good, fans and reporters became nostalgic about his "legendary" confrontations with Tatsumi Fujinami. Choshu felt trapped, since he had just turned 35, and many were saying he was slipping. Even though he retained his popularity with the fans, there was no doubt he was being outshone by his tag partner, Yatsu, who had developed into the best wrestler in Japan in many people's opinion.

In late February, Choshu disappeared. The word that came out was he had a hand injury, which needed surgery. That was apparently true, although his hand problems may have been exaggerated. By late March, everyone knew of Choshu's plans of taking his entire "army" back with him to New Japan and save the promotion, which was suffering from poor television ratings.

Choshu, and most of his wrestlers, had "iron-clad" contracts with All Japan through late March, and television contracts with Baba's network, Nippon TV, through the spring of 1988. When the dust cleared, it was obvious Choshu was through with All Japan and most of his followers would jump back with him. A rift between Choshu and Yatsu took place, and combined with Baba's offering Yatsu a large bonus (estimated at around \$40,000), Choshu's best partner didn't jump.

At the same time, the legal entanglements prevented Choshu from wrestling Inoki on the big "Inoki-Live" card on March 26 in Osaka. Masa Saito took up the vigil for Choshu and the big battle drew a gate of more than \$700,000. Caught in the middle, Animal Hamaguchi retired. Strong Machine, Kobayashi, Masa and Hiro Saito followed Choshu's lead. Yatsu, Teranishi and Shinichi Nakano, who was just starting to get a push from Baba, all remained with All Japan. Niikura, who had suffered a heart attack in Calgary some months earlier, had retired. Hiroshi Hase, the Olympic games hero from 1984 who had been getting groomed for stardom in Calgary, joined Choshu's group making the jump. Shunji Takano, wrestling in the U.S. as Super Ninja, was undecided but at this point it appears he will stay with Baba.

The whole Japanese wrestling world was turned around. But another battle was left. Choshu had a contract with Nippon TV, which wasn't about to let him off the hook easily. It was dragged into the courtroom. Nippon wanted \$709,000 for breach of contract.

Choshu and his group started for New Japan on June 1, and by October, Choshu was back on television. He actually made one TV appearance for TV Asahi, which broadcast his wedding, and doubled its normal viewing audience. The network figured at that point that Choshu was the savior. Much hype was done for a two-hour special on October 5, with Choshu's return to television plus the famous Antonio Inoki vs. Masa Saito feud finisher, a battle in the jungle on Ganryu Island. During Choshu's heyday in New Japan, the weekly wrestling show averaged a 20 rating and big matches did more than that. Even with All Japan, the ratings hovered between 13 and 16 for prime time slots, still acceptable. But Choshu's return to television was a disappointment, both when the numbers came in, plus when he and Fujinami failed to live up to their "legendary" level for a 35 minute match. Before the year was out, between Maeda's "shoot-kick" and the 12/27 fiasco in Tokyo, Choshu's status was at a low point and New Japan's TV future was even lower.

#### 4. THE BATTLE OF THANKSGIVING

With its acquisition of the UWF, wrestling fans, and the Crockett office, were salivating at the thought of Starcade '87. There was so much talent at Crockett's disposal, plus McMahon had already shown the power of wrestling on pay-per-view. Some were optimistically talking about a \$10 million show.

Enter McMahon. He saw that PPV saved Wrestlemania II, and made WMIII. Letting his chief opponent into that ballpark would mean he would actually have to slug it out on even terms. And one thing Vince McMahon has gone to all lengths to avoid, is ever being on even terms with anyone.

The Survivors' Series was created, the WWF's version of the Thanksgiving spectacular, set for Thanksgiving eve at the Richfield Coliseum. The Crocketts were well aware of those plans months before anyone else was, perhaps through the wrestling grapevine, perhaps due to their recent hiring of Jim Barnett. They weren't phased. If McMahon were to run that night, then Crockett was going to move his Starcade, set for Chicago, to a late afternoon slot. With so many families together on Thanksgiving, the PPV potential at that time was enormous. In fact, a cable doubleheader, with an actual tie-in with McMahon's show, pleased them even more. The Crocketts were confident that in any fair head-to-head matchup, their crew's superiority in the ring would



be to their advantage.

They would have been right, except they failed to realize McMahon had no intention of slugging things out on even terms.

McMahon had key leverage in the PPV field. Wrestlemania III was the biggest event the industry ever had. McMahon could do the dictating, at least coming off his big success. The terms, any cable company which wants Survivors Series, or Wrestlemania IV for that matter, can't show any wrestling 60 days before or 21 days after one of our big cards. Titan's public claim is they were doing this because they didn't want to confuse the wrestling fans, although in reality, Survivors was set up firstly simply to keep Crockett off PPV on Thanksgiving, and only secondly to perhaps make money on their own. Is the clause legal? It didn't really matter, by the time whomever would decide the issue had rendered a decision, Thanksgiving would have been years ago.

Titan wound up with about 400 cable companies on their side, despite several companies being upset at what they referred to as "blackmail tactics." About a half-dozen went with Crockett. One, here in San Jose, went with Crockett, although privately they admitted they wanted to be with Titan. "We made a commitment to Crockett first, and didn't want to break our word," they said almost apologetically. The game was over before it started.

Originally Crockett was going to run closed-circuit in 44 locations at 5 p.m. Eastern time, prime Thanksgiving dinner hours, 4 p.m. Central and 3 p.m. Mountain time. The West Coast was a forgotten entity. It would have been a disaster of major proportions. Thankfully, they realized it, and moved the starting time of the closed-circuit telecast to 8 p.m. Eastern, 7 p.m. Central, prime time for folks itching to get out of the house on Thanksgiving night.

Although many feared "Chi-town heat" wouldn't even sellout the Pavilion in Chicago, the reality was it sold out two weeks in advance. Pay-per-view, while successful with a better than six percent buy rate, wasn't profitable because so few companies had signed up. While a few closed-circuit sites were dropped at the last minute, and a few others probably should have been because of little interest, overall, the Crocketts made money on the show. The gross was estimated at \$1.3 million.

Titan, however, outdid themselves once again. They achieved a claimed seven percent buy rate. Between splits with cable companies and all that, Titan probably grossed in the neighborhood of \$4 million, much of it profit, since wrestlers' payoffs (aside from Hulk and Andre, who knows what they made) ranged from \$2,500 to \$10,000.

The real surprise of the Battle of Thanksgiving was in the ring. The financial success of both was determined beforehand, first by the cable companies, second, by Crockett saving their show by putting the closed-circuit on at exactly the right time.

On Thanksgiving night, Crockett's in-ring superiority wasn't evident. And Titan's superiority, not only in promotion, but also in production of a big show, was too evident. Most who saw both came to the same verdict. A victory for Titan.

In fairness to the Crockett wrestlers, they had performed one of their biggest shows of the year the previous night in New York, and were following it up with a 4 p.m. start in Chicago. Several wrestlers seemed a step sluggish because of that. Titan's wrestlers were all in 10 man tags, or in one case, a 20-man tag, with little chance of getting tired so they could all perform all out for brief periods.

Titan's key match was the return of Andre vs. Hogan, this time in a 10 man tag match. It wound up with Andre against Bam Bam Bigelow, with Andre pinning his rival in about 40 seconds. In the 19-minute match, Andre worked 70 seconds. Hogan was eliminated a few minutes earlier, counted out of the ring body slamming One Man Gang and King Kong Bundy on the matted floor. The opener on the card, a 10-man tag pitting Randy Savage's team (which with Ricky Steamboat, Jim Duggan, Jake Roberts and Brutus Beefcake was on paper the strongest quintet of the show) against Honkeytonk Man's team, was actually sluggish with the only good moments coming when Steamboat was involved. A 10-women match followed, with moderate heat, but the U.S. fans expect little from women, but instead they saw two tremendous little women, the Jumping Bomb Angels, who stole the show and saved the match. A 20-man match with all the WWF tag teams was the best actual wrestling on the show, lasting 37 minutes of non-stop action.

Crockett's key was Ron Garvin defending the NWA title against perennial kingpin Ric Flair in a cage match. This was hardly many fans' idea of a "dream match," but it would have to do since creative booking was "on the Fritz," so to speak.

But Crockett's biggest problem with the show itself also occurred before the show itself, the decision, originally made so cable operators could run both shows, to end the card by 6:30 p.m. Central time (when McMahon's show was scheduled to begin). It limited Starcade, normally a 12-match spectacular, to seven matches, and several of them, particularly Flair vs. Garvin, had to be rushed.

Flair and Garvin didn't put on a bad match. In fact, the last five minutes were excellent with Flair, to nobody's surprise, regaining the title. What was a surprise was the crowd's reaction. If the fall in TV ratings hadn't dragged the point home, the live crowd reaction should have. Making Garvin champion was a mistake, and having Flair a heel is even more a mistake.



While Garvin's character, the every-day guy who worked hard to achieve a goal nobody thought was possible, then achieved it, should clearly have been a babyface; while Flair, the perverted combination sex-maniac, egomaniac who bragged about his material possessions in theory, was as great a heel as wrestling has ever seen. But the crowd didn't see things the same way the organization tried to portray them. Flair instead, was the greatest wrestler not only in the organization, but of the era, victimized by a promotion which knows of no way to promote him except to continually embarrass him. He became, as the challenger, the babyface, since even those who didn't like the character had to respect him as a performer who "deserved" the title. Garvin, on the other hand, respected for toughness but lacking in color, was considered "undeserving" when it comes to being a World champion, and the crowd not only in Chicago, but in almost every other city, saw things the same way. In a sense Garvin became, almost as Vince has portrayed Honkeytonk Man, a totally undeserving champion who therefore is hated because of it.

The rest of the card was fine for a nightly show, but well below the standard the organization had set with three of the previous four Starcades. Dusty Rhodes won the U.S. title from Lex Luger in a match with little action but a great ending; Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson downed the Road Warriors on a DQ for the formers' NWA tag belts in the best actual match on the card, with the stupidest possible finish they could have come up with; Actually the ending of the Nikita Koloff vs. Terry Taylor match, the last seven or eight minutes, were pretty good with Nikita winning as expected. This match was already done in by the worst example of pre-match hype in history--totally discredit one of the participants and tell people he has no chance, and then for the first 10 minutes prove it. No wonder the crowd didn't react to it when it started getting good. This was a lesson in how not to promote; Rock & Roll Express beat Midnight Express in about as good a match as is possible on a scaffold; Steve Williams kept his UWF title pinning Barry Windham--in the year 2000 if people still remember that match, they'll still be trying to figure out what the point of it was; while Michael Hayes & Jimmy Garvin & Sting went to a 15:00 draw with Eddie Gilbert & Rick Steiner & Larry Zbyszko in the opener.

##### 5. MIKE VON ERICH COMES TO A TRAGIC END AT AGE 23

How much tragedy can one family endure? In truth, the Von Erichs have had enough for all of Denton County. Jack or Doris Adkisson have seen three sons die at young ages, one other have a near fatal experience in the ring and a fifth permanently injured in a motorcycle accident. Add to that the death of one grandchild and another run over.

Being a pro wrestler is a tough life. But for Fritz Von Erich, it may have been the easiest time of his life.

His son Mike, 23 died of a suicide on April 12th, ending what had been a tragic life.

It started early in life. As a child, Mike was the son of Fritz Von Erich, the famous tough guy and leading wrestling star in the area. Anyone in that position would have problems from kids who want to get in fights with the son of Fritz Von Erich. By the time he was a teenager, it was worse. His three older brothers, first Kevin & David, and later Kerry, were wrestling superstars and he was groomed to follow in their footsteps. But while his older brothers were all good athletes, starring at the high school level and dabbling in collegiate sports, Mike was unable to live up to their standards.

Then came pro wrestling. At 19, Mike debuted, and within two months was pushed as a World title contender. He wasn't ready, and most fans realized this fact. A few weeks later his brother David died in Japan at 25. Of all the brothers, Mike physically resembled David. Both were on the thin side, unlike Kerry, a competition bodybuilder, and Kevin, who played college football, with red hair and they say, photos of them at the same age you could hardly tell apart. David, however, at 6-foot-6, was nearly six inches taller than Mike. David also didn't have the agility or athletic ability of Kevin or Kerry, although many say he was the best wrestler of the three.

Immediately, and too soon, Mike was called on to fill David's footsteps. Mike was still a green wrestler, yet was pushed as being the best athlete in the family or the best amateur wrestler in the family. He was embarrassed, from his very first interview seven weeks before his pro debut, to his tragic demise, at the incredible hype given him.

Mike was a world-beater in the ring. Apparently, because of his size, it was thought that for him to retain his credibility, he would never be allowed to lose. Mike lost perhaps five or six matches in his career, which on-and-off, lasted nearly five years.

Mike debuted just before Thanksgiving of 1983, held the American title for some of 1984, but his career pretty well sputtered at that point because of his continual problem with a shoulder injury. Sometimes the excuses for the injury were downright laughable. Once they said Mike punched Killer Brooks so hard that not only was it the hardest punch anyone had ever seen in either boxing or wrestling, but that the force of the blow knocked Mike's shoulder out. After a half-dozen minor shoulder injuries, Mike went in for major surgery in August of 1985, contracted toxic shock syndrome and nearly died a few weeks later, and never should have been a wrestler again.

But there were tickets to sell for a July 4th spectacular in 1986 and Mike was back. He never even got to the level he had been at before the injury,

even then it took a talented performer to carry him. His career was going nowhere and he felt guilty about failing to live up to David's legacy, his marriage went awry, he had several outside the ring problems which made newspaper headlines and evidently was living in constant pain, not only from his wrestling matches, but from toxic shock, hepatitis and other illnesses he apparently never recovered completely from.

Mike was pulled over for apparent drunk driving, although in reality his blood alcohol level was under legal requirements although several downers were in his system which probably impaired his driving capabilities, on April 11. He was let out of jail the next day and presumably went to Lake Lewisville, overdosed on placydil after writing two suicide notes, and died.

What happened over the next three weeks is something that shouldn't have, and I'd like to leave it at that.

#### 6. RON GARVIN WINS THE NWA TITLE FROM RIC FLAIR IN DETROIT

For years, there has been a debate as to who the worst wrestler to hold the NWA World title, which in some people's mind is still the most prestigious title in pro wrestling. Ron Garvin wouldn't top that list.

But in the years to come, if the NWA can return to its former glory, young fans, seeing a history of the title and looking back, will come to names like Ron Garvin (and Tommy Rich), and ask why did this happen?

It's hard to explain. Ron Garvin was moderately popular, but not a consistent headliner. Actually, the only times Garvin would top a card was if he was challenging NWA champion Ric Flair. The two worked the "tightest" and most physical matches of probably any two wrestlers in the United States. That was Garvin's calling card. Tough guy. No charisma. No frills.

Garvin had been chasing Flair's title for years. Sometimes fans cared about it. Sometimes they didn't. Garvin was never perceived as a real threat by most fans, and was never "over" like, say Dusty Rhodes or Roddy Piper or Ricky Steamboat or Kerry Von Erich or Butch Reed or Magnum T.A. or so many of Flair's other challengers over the years.

So when the NWA decided to build up Starcade by having an interim champion and having the belt go back to Flair, an awful lot of fans were shocked that Garvin got the call. In retrospect, it obviously was a mistake.

That point it made by TV ratings and attendances for the Flair vs. Garvin rematches that took place for three weeks before Garvin's 40 days without a defense leading up to Starcade.

For the record, the title change took place on September 25 in Detroit. The match lasted 33:17, with Garvin winning this cage match with a sunset flip off the top ropes. By most accounts, the match was very good, but short of a four-star rating. And it certainly had to rank as one of the big shocks of the year.

The reaction of the public was a shock as well. Somehow, Garvin, as World champion, became a heel. Flair, as former champion, became a babyface. It wasn't supposed to be that way.

As expected, Flair regained the title two months later, on November 26 in the main event at Starcade '87 in Chicago.

Faster than you can say "ex-World champion," Garvin was dropped from the top of the cards and is back to being a bit player in the JCP production company. There have been worse wrestlers hold the NWA title, although Garvin surely ranks in most estimations well below long-term champs like Jack Brisco, The Funks, Gene Kiniski, Buddy Rogers, Ric Flair or Lou Thesz. In fact, it's almost ridiculous putting his name in the same paragraph or typing former NWA champion before his name. And if the NWA survives and people ask why, maybe someday someone will come up with a decent answer.

#### 7. JIM DUGGAN AND IRON SHEIK ARRESTED IN THE SAME CAR

Wrestling's most embarrassing moment of the year came on May 27. The day before, "Hacksaw" Jim Duggan, playing the role of the patriotic flag-waving American, and the Iron Sheik, his hated Iranian rival, were arrested with drug paraphenalia, in the same car, traveling to a match.

The two worked in a tag match against each other later that night with Duggan clobbering Sheik with a chair several times before pinning him.

While a normal "wrestler arrested with drugs" story gets two paragraphs and probably no wire service would pick it up. Just a few months later, another Titan wrestler, an even bigger star than either Duggan or Sheik, was arrested on a minor drug charge, and did anyone read about it?

Well, the media had a field day with this one. Complete with a page two article in the New York Daily News, it was picked up by the wire services and run in most major dailies, hit the TV news in several cities and even was mentioned in USA Today. The irony of two supposed enemies, not only traveling together, but apparently doing drugs together, was too much for the media to ignore.

For the record, Duggan and Sheik were driving through Middletown, New Jersey at about 2:20 p.m. when they were pulled over by state troopers. The officers had seen Duggan drinking a bottle of beer while driving. While walking up to the car, the officers caught the scent of burned marijuana cigarettes. Upon inspection, they found several joints in the ash tray of the car. Duggan was found with a small amount of marijuana, while in the



Sheik's shaving kit was three grams of cocaine. Both were released a few hours later, Duggan on his own recognisance and Sheik, after posting \$5,000 bond, went on to Asbury Park, and wrestled that night.

Titan had a public relations problem. How could they explain two rivals in a heated feud traveling together? There was no explanation. The best policy with Titan has always been ignore the truth and the best way to ignore the incident was to fire both men on the spot.

This spoiled Duggan's big homecoming show just a few days later in Glens Falls, his hometown, where his father had been Police Chief for many years.

A few changes were immediate to prevent this sort of thing from happening. Originally Titan came down with the edict that babyfaces and heels weren't supposed to be seen in public drinking together and would be fined for doing so. In addition, Titan began testing for drugs, although the only drug tested for was cocaine which made the policy somewhat ludicrous. At the same time, Titan suspended one of its biggest names who was in the midst of a big feud, coming close on the heels of Duggan's departure, so they at least had the guts to enforce their policy somewhat.

Vince McMahon realized the public has a short memory and it wasn't that long before Duggan was brought back. On August 28, as part of the Paul Boesch retirement card, Duggan worked a match as a special event, pulled a hamstring, but still entering the ring recieved a Hogan-like welcome. A few weeks later, hamstring taped up, ironically replacing a wrestler suspended for cocaine, Duggan was working a full schedule.

Sheik has even worked for Titan again, but thus far only in Europe, and ironically, in both Paris, France and Milan, Italy, his opponent was Duggan. But before the end of 1988, it's assumed Titan will bring him back if they think there is any marketability left.

Ironically, the entire situation was one born of bad luck. While there was a babyface/heel pair for Titan in 1987 which could have had this problem on a number of occasions, and it probably could happen on almost any circuit (even if the kay fabe wrestling by-laws stipulate babyfaces and heels should never travel together), it shouldn't have in this case.

Duggan and Sheik weren't regular driving companions. Somehow Sheik screwed up and at the airport, with Duggan the only one around, begged for a ride to Asbury Park. So the story goes, Duggan didn't like the idea, but he might as well help the guy out. Drinking a bottle of beer while driving in New Jersey during broad daylight certainly isn't the smartest thing Duggan has done in his lifetime and he could have been pulled over for it, and even had the burned marijuana cigarettes found, and it would have been basically a minor offense. But with the Sheik in the car, it became a federal offense so to speak.

#### 8. JERRY LAWLER LOSES HIS HAIR TO AUSTIN IDOL

In the wrestling business, there are very few things which have never been done. But April 27 at the Mid South Coliseum in Memphis saw several firsts.

While the big news was the eventual outcome of the match, which put what had been the best feud of the year to red-hot proportions, the gimmick before the match was unique.

Jerry Lawler was to wrestle Austin Idol for the Southern title in a cage match with hair vs. hair stipulations. And if Idol were to lose, all the money the customers paid to attend the card would be refunded.

The 8,500 fans and \$42,000 gate were the largest of the year in Memphis, probably in part because fans couldn't guess the ending. Lawler had never lost a hair match, and with his celebrity status in the community and his own local talk show on television, nobody could believe he ever would. Idol's character is so vain who would believe that. And anyone with any common sense would know that there is no way they are going to all that trouble to draw a big gate and then giving the money back.

It's amazing just how much impact what went down that night had. The match itself went close to 20 minutes. It was good, certainly not great by any means, up until the finish. Tommy Rich, who had been hiding underneath the ring since 3 p.m. that day, came from underneath the apron (they had built a special cage which not only went around the ring, but gave ample space on the floor for outside the ring brawling). There was a ref bump. Lawler was double-teamed, pinned, destroyed after the match for around 10 minutes partially because the heels were afraid to leave the cage and face the angry mob outside the ring. Lawler had his head shaved, although the truth is, it was billed as a full head shaving, and actually Lawler was given a stylish crewcut by his own personal barber, which may be why Lawler's return didn't get over like it should have.

A full scale riot was taking place outside the ring and more than a half hour after the matches had ended, the heels tried their luck leaving the cage for the sanctuary of the dressing room. It was a bad scene that night, and after a shooting the next week at the Coliseum parking lot, some fans became scared to come back to the arena.

Not only did Lawler lose the first hair match of his 17-year career. Not only did they draw the largest gate of the year. But this one match made this the feud of the year, would have won Idol heel of the year had he wrestled as a heel anywhere the last six months of the year (as it is, in half a year, he came in a close second) and was the springboard to national publicity for Paul E. Dangerously.



## 9. AKIRA MAEDA KICKS RIKI CHOSHU IN THE FACE

If the WWF had a public relations problem trying to explain why Duggan and Sheik were traveling together, think of the problems the New Japan office had trying to explain what all the fuss was about when Akira Maeda kicked Riki Choshu in the face.

In Tokyo on November 19, a six man tag match was in the main event with Choshu teaming with Hiro Saito and Masa Saito against the trio of Maeda, Nobuhiko Takada and Osamu Kido. A few problems developed early. Maeda wasn't selling for Choshu. Maeda's fans, and there were many at Korauken Hall that night, loved it. Then in one split second, New Japan's tag team tournament was destroyed and Maeda's career was placed in limbo.

Choshu had the scorpion deathlock, a combination boston crab and figure four leglock, on Kido. With his arms tied up applying the hold, Maeda came in for the save. Making a save with a kick is nothing unusual in wrestling. However, Maeda came from behind Choshu and kicked him all out, breaking a bone underneath the eye. Choshu immediately started bleeding from the cheek and his eye got puffy, although he wasn't knocked out by the blow. In fact, he went right after Maeda and all the wrestlers actually had to hold Choshu back. They went right to the finish of the match and in the dressing room, Maeda was advised to evacuate in a hurry or problems would develop further.

Choshu was injured and had to take a month off. Maeda was immediately suspended. But no solid explanation was possible for all the fuss over a kick to the face. So Maeda was shooting. The smart fans understood that. But even the casual fans, who probably understood it as well, realized New Japan would have a tough time explaining. How can you suspend someone for kicking too hard?

Choshu, doing his best imitation of a U.S. wrestler trying to turn reality into an angle, went to the press and demanded that Maeda be taken off suspension so he could deal his own form of justice. Naturally he saw money in a feud with Maeda. Surely the potential was there. But Maeda had other problems in the past, and Maeda had become the scapegoat to New Japan's television ratings drop. In truth, there was validity to that. Maeda's submission holds style, which made him very popular at the live shows, was a style "over-the-head" of casual fans. New Japan already had decided to phase Maeda down anyway in 1988 and push Antonio Inoki's feud with comedian Takeshi Kitano, and the kick made it easier to slide him out of the picture.

New Japan was then faced with holding its tag team tournament without two of its three biggest drawing cards. This killed interest during what is traditionally the most important tour of the year, and made even more drastic by the success Baba was having with the return of Bruiser Brody and Abdullah the Butcher.

Not only that, but there was a very good chance Choshu and Masa Saito were actually going to win the tournament. So with Maeda and Choshu out, the entire tournament had to be "re-worked."

## 10. ROAD WARRIORS SIGN LONG-TERM DEAL WITH CROCKETT

Ever since the "War of '84" began, speculation and rumors have run rampant about the Road Warriors heading to the WWF. It was only natural. The WWF is home of the gimmicks. The Road Warriors are the ultimate gimmick. In many people's mind, they are second to Hogan in potential popularity and first in wrestling in violent aura.

The rumors were even more rampant this year, since the Warriors were the only major Crockett act that wasn't under contract. The fact that it was no secret the Roadies were upset in April when Dusty Rhodes & Nikita Koloff, and not them, got to win the tag team tournament.

At that point the rumor mill started going overtime. But at this time, there was some truth to them. The Warriors were talking with Titan, although the talks didn't occur until several months later. One day they were even in Connecticut in the Titan offices for a bargaining session. The Warriors got the story floated that they wanted \$1 million per year apiece, although knowing wrestling economics, that was a ridiculous request. There are several different versions of what came out of that meeting: a) Titan wouldn't offer them a guaranteed contract since they claimed, they don't offer them to anyone as policy; b) Titan offered a guaranteed contract, but for much less than the Warriors were expecting; or c) Titan offered a big contract but the Warriors turned it down.

Some hard bargaining sessions with Jim Crockett followed. While on tour of Japan in October, the Warriors told the Japanese press that they were going to sign a five-year deal with Crockett in mid-November, just before Starcade.

From all indications, that has taken place. Still, one has to wonder.

The Warriors pride themselves on several things, and being control of their own destiny is one of them. Certainly a trip to Titan would mean swallowing a measure of pride in some way. Their characters would certainly be toned down and their interviews would, at least on important occasions, be scripted for them. Whatever independence they have would be gone. Japanese tours, where Hawk, Animal and Paul Ellering earn \$10,000 per week, would be gone as well. In addition, the Roadies, as a tag team, while certainly would become a hot item for Titan, would still be put in the tag team position which isn't prime position on Titan shows. They would certainly have to play second fiddle to Hulk Hogan. On the other hand, there are heavy financial opportunities with Titan. And because of that, I'll bet the rumors will never die out.



## MR. MIKE'S TOP STORIES OF 1987

### CROCKETT BUYS UWF FROM WATTS

The single biggest step of contrition of the top promotions. . . A sure sign from arguably the most intelligent of the promoters (at least without question the smartest of promoters who were once wrestlers) that this is a good business to get out of. . . Apalling use of assets purchased. . . Became a textbook case of how not to handle a business takeover. . . The overexposure of the Crockett product, a product unresponsive to any market pure dynamics, may have actually hurt it in the mid to long run (witness their nosediving TV numbers). . . Way to go, guys. Can anyone think of anything positive that resulted from this?

### CHOSHU JUMPS BACK TO NEW JAPAN

Probably as important, maybe even more so than the one above. . . Any time on single individual can change the promotion equation for a country like Japan, well, that's significant. . . He didn't jump alone, either. And even though Yoshiaki Yatsu stayed with All Japan, it's kind of like he isn't there, either. . . Without Choshu, would New Japan still be on TV? . . . With him, will they stay on? That's a top story for next year. . . Even though Choshu didn't get on TV until late in the year, the anticipation kept up lots of interest. . . But it cast an overall bad light on the guy, the promotion and the whole wrestling business. . . Anytime you erode your base audience or potential for crossover appeal, it's also important. . . This also made the necessity of Baba reacquiring our beloved Bruiser Brody all the more imminent. Thanks, Riki.

### WRESTLEMANIA III DEFIES ALL ASPECTS OF REALITY

90,000 people in one place? . . . A 10 percent pay-per-view buy rate? . . . Intelligent handling of the third annual extravaganza showing a definite improvement on earlier big show shortcomings? . . . Few celebrities, many decently-built issues and angles, a few decent matches? . . . It was the most incredible display of mass hypnosis ever witnessed by this zonked examiner on their success of establishing Andre vs. Hogan heat. . . Good God! 90,000 f---in' idiots, most of whom couldn't possibly have seen the ring from the Superdome Stratosphere!! That's a big story to me. . . Is there any doubt that Titan is the No. 1 promotion? I'm just not sure of what the hell it is they promote. Crockett isn't even No. 2 in this league.

### MIKE VON ERICH DOES HIMSELF IN

The saddest and sickest personal tragedy story of the past few years. . . It was made all the more so sad and sick by the Worldly Crass handling of it, like Mike died for some worthy cause or something. . . It was the final act of a promotion entirely too painful to even follow any longer. . . It's hard not to feel bad for the Adkisson family. Somehow they make it possible, tho.

### BRODY FINALLY RETURNS TO JAPAN

This recent story may only be of low-key importance, but for Brody believers everywhere, it's kind of like a personal triumph. It isn't so much that Brody's mule attitude "won out" (hey, whatever price he held out for is probably less for Baba, due to dollar devaluation, than what he was making in the first place three years ago). Really Brody only succeeded in depriving himself with his fiscal follies. . . It's just good to see him back in form when we were all scared he was reaching the point of not being able to do it anymore. . . Check out the best brawler list.

### NEW JAPAN'S TV NUMBERS NOSEDIVE

As noted, this is an evolving story which may get bigger in 1988. . . It's hard to foresee what's going to happen in the long-run. . . The demotion of time slot/exposure plus the resulting license fee cut might jeopardize the very stability of the Inoki company, stability for Inoki being a precarious thing at best anyway. . . The real story is the obvious waning of pro wrestling as such a hot Japanese commodity. It's kind of like there's a world-wide wrestling recession, and even the inscrutable Japanese aren't immune to it.

### DUGGAN AND IRON SHEIK: "WHERE THERE'S SMOKE, YOU'RE FIRED"

For incurring the kay fabe violation of getting busted while actually traveling together like, like....Civil Business Associates! . . . The hapless Khosrow Vaziri and his fondness for South American alkaloid  $C_{17}H_{21}NO_4$  and a moronic James Duggan, who brilliantly drinks in open view and in broad daylight while engaged in personal vehicular transportation with a roach-filled ashtray at hand, found out just what it took to get their asses fired. Oh the shame. The embarrassment. The outright awkward-

ness of the Titan public relations department trying to deal with the breach of public mis-trust. . . On the bright side, it put the ki-bosh on the Peurile Persian angle that prolonged the presence of Sheik K.V., wasted the talents of a rapidly-declining Duggan, and helped put us back to sleep during the broadcasts.

#### LAWLER VS. IRON WITH TOMMY RICH RUN-IN IN MEMPHIS

It's nice to have a story based on something positive. . . Early 1987 was like a time-warp in this Tennessee town. . . Good talent and promotion contriving a heated issue with multiple variations, good build-up, good execution and final payoff with twists both clever and unexpected. The most fun to follow of anything all year.

#### HENNIG'S EXTORTION PAYS OFF//REMAINS ONLY LINK BETWEEN AWA'S EXISTENCE AND COLLAPSE

Curt Hennig's reign as World champion is sort of like a czar after the revolution. . . I mean, what's left? Who believes? Where does he reign? . . . Still, among us diehard loyalists, this only link to the bygone days of a "real" "World" champion is all we've got. . . And Curt's pretty good, too. . . He's worthy of the honor under even credible circumstances.

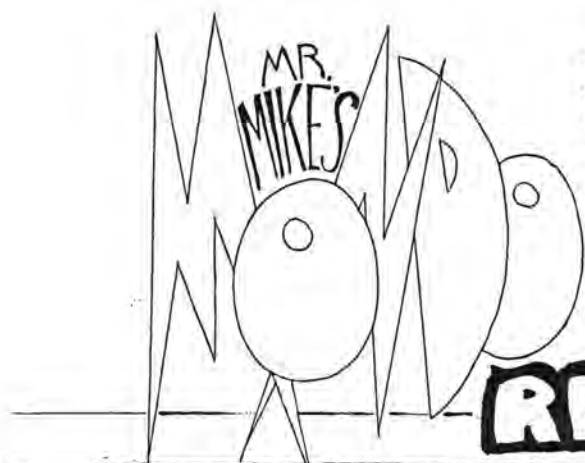
#### BATTLE OF THANKSGIVING

This was the first major blow against Crockett from a direct marketing assault. . . There was no reason that Titan shouldn't have done it, mind you. . . While I haven't perceived pay-per-view as "the future of the business" as it was stated in the 12/28 Observer, Titan may very well agree with Dave's analysis. . . At any rate, the impending Titan direct moves on JCP will wind up removing all doubt that there is going to wind up being one "major" promotion. . . Because Titan's so much more in tune with their audience than JCP with its audience, they're going to be the one. . . Of course, the audiences are somewhat different, and Crockett at least should be a profitable but distant No. 3.

*and then* THERE'S THOSE STORIES THAT  
SHOULD HAVE BEEN, OR COULD HAVE BEEN, OR...  
BUT DUE TO THE VICISSITUDES OF THIS NUTTY BIZ,  
ONLY APPEAR ON THE LIST OF THE FLOP TEN ...

1. TED DIBIASE'S HEEL TURN IN THE UWF AND SUBSEQUENT FEUD WITH STEVE WILLIAMS WINS FEUD OF THE YEAR.
2. BRUISER BRODY & JIMMY SNUKA WIN THE TAG TOURNAMENT OF NEW JAPAN, DEC. 1986.
3. NWA FLORIDA BUYOUT REVITALIZES THE CITRUS CIRCUIT.
4. MISSY HYATT CROSSES OVER AND BREAKS OUT WITHIN MONTHS OF JOINING THE WWF. VINCE MCMAHON REAFFIRMED AS MARKETING GENIUS DUE TO MISSY'S ULTIMATE RICH BITCH ROLE.
5. RIC FLAIR TURNS BABYFACE, MAKES FANS FORGET DUSTY RHODES.
6. AUSTIN IDOL LOSES HIS LOOKS AS THE DEMISEMENT TO THE INCREDIBLE LAWLER/IDOL/RICH SERIES.
7. EDDIE GILBERT WINS BEST BOOKER OF THE YEAR FOR HIS EBULLIENT BOOKING.
8. FRITZ VON ERICH RETIRES, CITING FAMILY CONSIDERATIONS. KERRY VON ERICH SEEKS VOCATIONAL THERAPY.
9. AWA - CWA MERGE AS JERRY JARRETT FINALLY GETS SOME CABLE EXPOSURE. VERNE GAGNE STEPS DOWN FROM DAY TODAY OPS.
10. AND ON A TRAGIC NOTE, VERNE GAGNE AGAIN IN THE NEWS - WHILE ATTENDING THE PAUL BOESCH RETIREMENT SHOW, VERNE LOSES IT, SHOOTS VINCE MCMAHON, URINATES ON HULK HOGAN, AND TRIES ONE MORE TIME TO SELL THE AWA TO THE WWF.





# YEAR IN REVIEW

EVEN THOUGH I WAS ALWAYS TAUGHT 'IF YOU DON'T HAVE SOMETHING NICE TO SAY, DON'T SAY ANYTHING', IT'S TIME AGAIN TO RELIVE SOME OF THOSE MONDO BIZARRO HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR NOW PAST. GREETINGS 'GOONS, IT'S THAT ANNUAL EXERCISE IN POINTLESSNESS, MR. MIKE'S MONDO WRESTLING YEAR END WRAP. ANOTHER BANNER YEAR FOR WE PSYCHOTRONIC SLAM FANS: ANY SANER SOUL WOULD KNOW WHEN TO GIVE IT UP. BUT WITH MORBID FASCINATION WE REMAIN MONDO MARKS. WHY ELSE WOULD, IN SUCH A MEMORABLE YEAR, THE FOLLOWING FEW STAND OUT FOR A SPECIAL MONDO MENTION?



ANNOUNCING  
PAIR OF  
THE YEAR

ONE OF THE FEW GENUINE BRIGHT SPOTS TO THE YEAR 1987 WAS THE INCANDESCENT PRESENCE OF ASCENDING ALL TIME MONDO FAVE, THE REDOUTABLE **MISSY HYATT!** OL' MISS GRACED SEVERAL LOCALES THIS YEAR, AND IN VARYING ROLES. AND INCREDIBLY, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, RISING ABOVE ATTEMPTS TO SUBMERGE, MISUSE OR IGNORE HER ASSETS, THOSE OBVIOUS AND OTHERWISE. EARLY IN THE YEAR, THE UWF KINDA RAN HOT AND COLD, BUT AT LEAST THEY INVOLVED THE LASS IN THOSE MEMORABLE CAT FIGHT COMBOS WITH THOSE OTHER BIMBO REGULARS SUNSHINE, NICKLA, AND THE WONDERFUL DARK JOURNEY. BOUTS BETTER PLAYED IN THE MIND THAN IN THE RING. THEN THE BIG BREAK ARRIVED! YES! HOLLYWOOD! THE BIG TIME! GLAMOUR! THAT ROCKET TO THE STARS, THE **W!** CERTAINLY **THEY** WOULD KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH THE DYNAMO DAMSEL. AFTER ALL, THEY ARE CERTIFIED MARKETING GENIUSES. BUT, IN OUR FAVORITE MONDO BIZARRO STORY OF THE YEAR, MISSY'S WHIFF SHIFT WAS QUANTUM QUICK AND WITH NO TANGIBLE PROOF. SOME IDIOT CAST MISSY AS AN INNOCUOUS BABYFACE IN A PIT-LIKE SEG "MISSY'S MANOR" OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT ILLERATIVE DRIVEL. IT MUST HAVE BEEN A MEGA-DUD, CAUSE, DID YOU EVER SEE IT? LET MISSY BE MISSY! THE CRITICS CHORUSED, BUT IT WAS NOT TO BE. RETURNING TO A UWF NOW UNDER THE VISION OF VIRGIL, WHAT TO DO? PLAY VALET-BITCH SUPREME? SPARKLE AS TEEVEE OFF-COLOR COMMENTATOR? DAZZLE

AS SOLD-HOST AND PRIMAL PRESENCE ON THE WTBS SUNDAY SHOW? STAY HOME AND START A FAMILY? ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE, BUT NONE COMPLETELY SATISFYING IN AIRING THE AIRHEAD HEIRESS ACT. BEST THOUGH, AND DESERVING OF SPECIAL MENTION, WAS THE ONGOING SET AS COLOR CUTIE TO JIM ROSS' DISTRACTED PLAY BY PLAY. THEIR EXCHANGES WERE OFTEN PRICELESS AND ALWAYS BIZARRE. AS OFTEN AS NOT, THEY TALKED ABOUT TWO DIFFERENT THINGS DURING MID-MATCH CONVERSATIONS, WITH MISSY GOADING AND BAITING, JIMBO REJOINING WITH REFRAIN OR INNUENDO. DID YOU EVER SORTA SENSE THAT MAYBE THE PERSONAL JIBES WERE ONLY LIGHTLY WORKED? THIS WAS MISSY AT HER CHARACTER BEST, AND THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF THE BABE. IT IS A CHARACTER, A WONDERFUL, WICKED, WHINEY LITTLE TART, AND THE HYATT EXECUTION IS A RIOT. WITH HER PULCHRITUDINOUS PRESENCE, THE OFTEN CITED EXAMPLES OF SWIMSUIT POSTERS OR AUTOGRAPHED G-STRINGS STILL SEEM THE LOGICAL PROGRESSION OF MARKET EXPLOITATION. WILL ANYONE EVER LET THE BIGGEST THINGS BE THE BIGGEST THING IN THE BIZ? 'LET MISSY BE MISSY' MAY NOT BE SO BAD AFTER ALL!



THE AWA (ANYONE WHO'S AVAILABLE) STANDS ABOUT ONE WRESTLER AWAY FROM NO LONGER HAVING AN EVEN REMOTE RESEMBLANCE TO A VIABLE ENTITY, AND THAT ONE SOUL IS **ITS** WORLD CHAMP, **CURT HENNIG.** CURT FINALLY GAINED THE PROMISED STRAP THIS YEAR, BUT ONLY AFTER A FEW ROUNDS OF EXTORTION TO SECURE THE LOVED CROWN. AN INTERESTING ODYSSEY EXPERIENCED BY THIS PRETTY IMPRESSIVE PUTZ IN 1987. PROMISED THE TITLE WHEN REMAINING INDENTURED TO GAG-ME INC BACK IN '86, NO TITLE WAS IN EVIDENCE AT YEAR'S END. A VERNAL EQUINOX, BUT NO BELT. MAYBE IT'S TAKING ALL THIS TIME TO FIGURE OUT HOW THEY WANT TO DO IT. IS CURT A HEEL OR A HERO? SOMEHOW THE HENNIG HEEL AND BOCKWINKLE BABY COMBO IS UNAVOIDABLE, TRY TWO THEY DID. SUDDENLY COMES EARLY MAY, AND AS IF FROM COMPELLING URGENCY, CURT WINS THE TITLE FROM NICKY, OR DOES HE? WELL, IT ALL DEPENDS ON THE OUTCOME OF CERTAIN ENTREATIES FROM SOME EASTCOAST MONOLITHIC MAT MOB. WILL CURT GO, WILL HE STAY? IS THE CHAMPIONSHIP CARROT ENOUGH? SO IT WOULD APPEAR, AS CURT IS RULED THE NEW CHAMP DESPITE THE LARRY ZYBYSZKO INTRUSION CONCUSSION, AND CURT'S TRAVEL BAGS REMAINED UNPACKED, SINCE THAT TIME, CURT'S HELD THE MORIBUND MANTLE WITH DISTINCTION, THO ON OCCASION, THE TITLE HAS AGAIN BEEN 'HELD UP', PENDING A DECISION BY THE CHAMPIONSHIP COMMITTEE AND HENNIG'S TRAVEL AGENT. WHAT-EVER SATISFACTION CURT GETS BEING TOP DOG TO AN EMPTY KENNEL, HE'S WELCOME TO. CAUSE HE'S GOOD ENOUGH TO SHINE FOR ANY GRAPPLE GROUP EVEN IF HIS CHIEF LURE TO THE TITAN GOONS IS THE ADVERSE AWA IMPACT ARISING FROM HIS ABSENCE.



HAPPILY, GORDON SENILE LIVES UP TO HIS NAME AND VAUNTED REPUTATION (THE "WALTER CRONKITE" OF WRESTLING JOURNALISM INDEED; HEY GORDO - PLEASE OBSERVE THAT W.C. RETIRED A FEW YEARS AGO. WHY THE LAPSE IN EMULATION?) GORD'S AT HIS BEST WHEN INTRODUCING A JAPANESE TAPE FOR THE "FOREIGN MATCH OF THE WEEK" SEG. IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT OF GETTING A NAME PRONOUNCED CORRECTLY, IT'S USUALLY OF SOMEONE OTHER THAN AN INDICATED PARTICIPANT. WE KNOW THEY ALL LOOK ALIKE, IT'S JUST NICE OF YOU TO REASSURE US AS TO YOUR LUCIDITY. QUICK MENTION GOES TO BONNIE BLACKSTONE, HOSTESS OF SOME REALLY INSIPID Q & A SPOT. FOR MONTHS WE NEVER HEARD A WORD SHE SAID - WE WERE TOO DISTRACTED BY THE WAY HER FOREHEAD WRINKLED AS SHE SPOKE. WE NOTED WITH RELIEF AROUND MID-YEAR A SUBTLE HAIR STYLING SHIFT TO MASK THIS QUIRK. UNFORTUNATELY, WE THEN BEGAN TO HEAR HER DRIVE... OH WELL, AT LEAST IT'S UP TO THEIR USUAL HIGH STANDARDS.



"MICK" KARCH - RHYMES WITH LARCH, NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH HIS DELIVERY STYLE.

WE HAVE TO MAKE BRIEF MENTION OF LOCAL HERO, MONDO IDOL, AND SYCOPHANT SUPREME, THE BOW TIED BEDECKED DANDY MICK KARCH, WHO FINALLY GOT THAT LONG AWAITED BIG BREAK OF AN ANNOUNCING JOB FOR AN ENFEEBLED AWA. WE'RE NOT SURE WHY HE'S AT LONG LAST QUALIFIED FOR EMPLOYMENT, BUT NONETHELESS THRILLED FOR THE GUY. HE'S BEEN PREPARING FOR YEARS -- I FIGURE WHY ELSE THE NAME CHANGE? NO LONGER WILL MICK HAVE TO SLINK AROUND BACKSTAGE TO GRAB A QUICK CONVERSATION WITH HERO NICK BOCKWINKLE, OR A SURREPTITIOUS GLANCE DOWN SHERI MARTELL'S DRESS. OF COURSE, NOW THAT HE'S WORKING FOR THE AWA, HE STILL CAN'T, BUT AT LEAST THE JOB HAS HIM DRESSING BETTER! REMEMBER MICK, IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR 60 MINUTE'S SAFER.



IN THE PANTHEON OF PATHETIC SLOBS, THE SENIOR SLOTH WAS MERELY REAFFIRMED BY THE YEAR 1987. YES, WE COME TO VILIFY VIRGIL, NOT TO PRAISE HIM. IT WAS A YEAR OF MOUNTING TRANSGRESSIONS, ALTHOUGH IT COULDA BEEN WORSE. AT LEAST HE DIDN'T MAKE HIMSELF CHAMP; WE HAD SURROGATE SLUG RONNIE GARVIN TO FILL THAT SLOT. BUT WITH PERVERTED DELIGHT, THE ROTUND SCUM POSITIONED HIMSELF AS ALWAYS, TO BE THE ULTIMATE ARBITER OF ALL BABYFACE ANGLES. WELL GEE, IT'S EASY TO UNDERSTAND THOUGH, IT'S BEEN THIS WAY FOR YEARS. IN 1986, IT WAS DIFFICULT NOT TO VOTE THIS CRUSTY TOAD THE BEST BOOKER; IN 87, WITHOUT DOING ANYTHING DIFFERENT, HE'S AMONG THE POOREST. THAT OF COURSE IS THE PROBLEM: EVEN WITH THE ADDITION OF THE UWF STABLE, VIRGE THE DIRGE REVOLVED THE STORIES AROUND THE SAME COTERIE OF CRONIES. THE ONLY NEW ADMIT TO THE INNER CIRCLE JERK WAS LEX LUGUBRIOUS, WHO THOUGH GENERALLY USED WELL, WAS BY YEARS END BEING SO ABSURDLY OVERPRAISED ("ONE OF THE GREATEST WRESTLERS OF ALL TIME -- ALMOST AS GOOD AS DUSTY HIMSELF!") THAT IT CAN ONLY WORK AGAINST THE STIFF. ENDLESS BATTLES BETWEEN THE SAME GENERAL COMBOS, WITLESS HAND LING OF A STILL GREAT RIC FLAIR, AND UNFORGIVABLY BORING TEEVEE, MADE PERMANENTLY SO BY THE FACT ITS NOT ENOUGH DUSTY TALKS ABOUT HIMSELF WITH THEISTIC GLEE, EVERYONE ELSE ECHOES THE SAME INPRAUSIBLE PLATITUDES. WE ARE AWASH WITH HABITUAL HEBETUDE.

STILL, BIG DUST ISN'T ENTIRELY TO BE BLAMED. HE'S ONLY DOING WHAT ANY SELF-CONSUMED CONTEMPTABLE CRETIN WOULD DO. THE TOP COWS IN THE JCP WHEEL ARE PRESUMABLY IN CONCURRANCE. WHETHER THIS ABSURD ACQUIESCENCE WILL CONTINUE THRU '88 WE'LL HAVE TO SEE, BUT IF YOU WANT TO WASTE TALENT, RUIN SHOWS, STAGNATE TV PRESENTATION, DESTROY JUST PURCHASED CIRCUITS, AND GENERALLY ALL AROUND BLOW THE CHANCE TO SKEW WIDE AS A STRONG NUMBER TWO IN NATIONAL PROMOTIONS, WELL, THEN, I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE BETTER. HOW ELSE TO JUDGE THIS COVERLESS BOOK?



IT WAS ANOTHER IMMINENTLY FORGETTABLE YEAR FOR OUR LOCAL LEIGE LORD GRAPPLE GOD **VERNE GAG-ME**, AS FURTHER INDIGNITY HEAPED UPON INDIGNITY IN THE STRUGGLE TO UPHOLD A LIFETIME OF DECEIT. WHAT COMPLETELY ASTOUNDS US IS HE'S STILL AROUND, DESPITE THE UTTER APATHY OF HIS ABSENT AUDIENCE. WHY DO WE STILL HAVE VERNE TO KICK AROUND? WELL, SINCE HE INSISTS, WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

WE GIVE CREDIT TO THIS FELLOW MINNESOTA MORON FOR TRYING, AS HIS EFFORTS TO PRESENT VETERAN NAMES OFFERS PROOF: HE HASN'T EARNED THE ENMITY OF EVERY ACTIVE ACT. YET. IT'S A TESTAMENT TO THE FRACTIONALIZED STATE OF THE BIZ THAT THE BIG TWO OUTCASTS PUT IN THEIR TWO WEEKS FOR THE STILL SELF PROCLAIMED "MAJOR LEAGUE OF WRESTLING": THE FEATURED FLOTSAM READS LIKE A VERITABLE "WHO'S WAS" OF WRESTLING: TOMMY RICH, DICK SLATER (NOT DICK RAINES ROD TRONGAARD, YOU NESCIENT NITWIT), BOB ORTON, DENNIS CONDREY, ADRIAN ADONIS, EVEN BUDDY LANDELL WAS IN FOR ALMOST AN HOUR. MOST LAST ONLY UNTIL IT'S TIME TO DECIDE WHO'S GONNA PAY THE AIRFARE.

OF COURSE, THINGS WENT THE OTHER WAY TOO, AS VICIOUS VINCE MCMAHON CONTINUED TO PLUCK AT WILL HERR GAGNE'S CAREFULLY POSITIONED 'TALENT,' AND FOR NO PRODUCTIVE REASON: IT'S JUST THE PISSING CONTEST CONTINUING PAST THE POINT OF CONSCIOUSNESS. SINCE THE AWA COULDN'T DRAW WITH AN ETCH-A-SKETCH, IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER, BUT THE CONTINUED TAG CHAMP SABOTAGE FIRST ELIMINATED THE MILDLY ENTERTAINING MIDNIGHT ROCKERS, AND DEGENERATED TO THE UNLIKELY DEPTHS OF A GRAB ON BORING-US ZUKKOV, (THE "GOOD" MEMBER OF THE TEAM TOO.ESAD) WHO FINALLY REALIZED HIS LIFE LONG DREAM OF A FULL TIME JOB IN PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING. FAR MORE DAMAGING WAS THE INEVITABLE SNATCH (SO TO SPEAK) OF SHERI MARTEL, WHO, UNFORTUNATELY FOR VERNE, WAS THE MOST OVER HEEL HE HAD. AGAIN TO THEIR CREDIT, THIS SLOT WAS QUICKLY FILLED WITH ANOTHER PIECE OF ASSET, THE LEWD BUT LIMITED MEDUSA MECELLI.

THEIR ANGLE ACUMEN CONTINUED WITH APLOMB. WHO COULD FORGET THAT CAREFULLY CRAFTED FEUD BETWEEN JIMMY SNUKA AND COL. DEBEERS. THAT WAS THIS YEAR, WASN'T IT? IT ONLY TOOK MONTHS TO ESTABLISH THAT CURT HENNIG IS A HEEL, BARELY IN TIME FOR HIS WINNING THE TITLE FROM AS EQUALLY A DISTINCT BABYFACE, A SOON DEPARTED NICK BOCKWINKLE. LITTLE ELSE COMES TO MIND, NOT ENTIRELY DUE TO MY BRAIN CHEMISTRY. RECENT SUCCESSSES INCLUDE LATCHING ON TO A PROMISING PAUL E. DEE. AS CHIEF MISCHIEF MAKER-MANAGER, THEN TELLING HIM TO TONE IT DOWN: IT'S TOO ENTERTAINING. THE GOOD NEWS IS GREG GAGNE DIDN'T BECOME WORLD CHAMP; THE BAD NEWS IS OUR FAVORITE SUPER ANNUATED ANOREXIC JUST WON THE PRETIGIOUS "TV TITLE" (THE UNIVERSE REALLY NEEDS ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE), CLIMAXING A LARGELY THEORETICAL MULTI-MONTH TOURNEMENT, AN UNLIKELY ENDEAVOR I WAS SURE THEY'D FORGET ABOUT BEFORE IT CONCLUDED.

SO AMONG THE BLITHERING BURLESQUE, DO I ACTUALLY DEIGN TO COMMENT? DON'T BE RIDICULOUS: OUR INDIGNOUS IMBECILES HAD NO PROBLEM IN REMOVING ANY QUESTION AS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF INTELLIGENT LIFE. I CAN PERHAPS STOMACH THEIR ADDED PRATTLE ABOUT HOW THE AWA IS THE **ORIGINAL** WRESTLING LEAGUE (?), WHERE REAL ATHELETES COME TO **WRESTLE**. FORGEE THE **HYPE**, THE **GLITZ** (AND FORGET GOOD NAMES OR BOOKING, BUT THAT'S ANOTHER PARAGRAPH), **THIS** IS WHERE THE SERIOUS WRESTLERS WANT TO BE!! I CAN MUCH LESS INGEST THE OBNOXIOUS MANNER IT'S DELIVERED, HOW IS IT WE BOAST A GAGGLE OF CARNIVAL BARKING SHILLS IN LARRY NELSON, ROD TRONGAARD (OUR FAVE) AND THE ADORABLE AL DERUSHA? AFTER ALL THAT'S TRANSPIRED, EACH HOUSE CARD WAS STILL THE GREATEST EVER! EMPTY ARENAS ACTUALLY NEAR **SELL** OUTS! A MILLION DOLLAR BATTLE ROYAL PRIZE (WE'RE STILL GAGING OVER THAT ONE)! NOW, LYING AND DUPING THE CROWD IS TIME HONORED AND TRADITION, BUT THE EXCESSIVE INSULTING OF THE FEW RETARDS STILL IN ATTENDANCE (WE'RE AMONG THEM OF COURSE, BUT IT'S OUT OF PROFESSIONAL NECESSITY YOU SEE) CAN BE OF ABSOLUTLY NO POSSIBLE ADVANTAGE. YOU CAN STRETCH THE MARKS DISBELIEF SUSPENSION ONLY SO FAR, BUT THEY STRETCH MARKS MORE THAN ADRIAN ADONIS. WHAT EVER THEIR GRIZZLY FATE EVENTUALLY WILL BE, IT WILL BE BETTER THAN THEY DESERVE. BUT LIKE A 48 CHROMOSOME OFFSPRING THOUGH, WE HUG THESE MORIBUND MORONS TO OUR HEARTS: WHAT ELSE ARE WE TO DO FOR LAUGHS?



FROM HIS SINGULAR SOBRIQUET TO HIS POKED COMPLEXION, HIS NATTY ATTIRE TO HIS CAREFUL COIFFURE, "**DOWNTOWN BRUNO**" DOZZED ON THE MEMPHIS SCENE TO REDEFINE THE OBNOXIOUS WIMP CUM' MANAGER ROUTINE. HIS LOOK IS SO COMPLETE I THOUGHT I COULD ALMOST SMELL HIM THROUGH THE T.V. SET, A VICTIM OF QUANTITY OVER QUALITY SCHOOL OF INTERVIEW, HIS RAP DID IMPROVE SOME IN BOTH CONTENT AND STYLE, BUT SUFFERED FROM TOO MUCH AIR TIME. STILL, THE WRETCHED LITTLE THUG IS JUST DIFFERENT ENOUGH TO BE DESERVING OF CONTINUED WORK. PUT PLEASE, MOMMA DON'T HAVE TO SAY IT 'BEEZ THAT WAY' ALL THE TIME.



"DOWNTOWN BRUNO"



I THINK  
VISUAL CREDIBILITY  
IS THE SINGLE  
MOST IMPORTANT  
FACTOR OF GOOD  
BOOKING.....



« VIRGIL »

INSPIRATIONAL WRESTLER  
OF THE YEAR ?

THIS VIRGIL  
ALWAYS LOOKS  
PISSED OFF 'CAUSE  
OF THE STUPID RED-  
NECK NAME HE'S  
BEEN STUCK WITH.

SO GOOD. IT DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE DAMAGE IT WOULD HAVE INFLECTED ON THE OLD MID-SOUTH/UWF. FANCIFUL FIGURES WERE HEARD, BUT WHAT WOULD THEY DO WITH HIM? HOW'S A GUY WITH NO GIMMICK GOING TO LOOK IN A UNIVERSE WHERE EVERYONE HAS SOME SORTA IDENTIFYING HANDEL/GIMMICK? THEN MAYBE, IT WAS TOO LATE, AS TED'S HEAT WAXED IN THE FACE OF UWF BUSINESS SLOWING AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF STEVE WILLIAMS. OF COURSE, THE BIZARRO EVENTS OF THIS SPRING LAST SHOOK UP ALL ARRANGEMENTS AND TED WAS MORE THAN AVAILABLE TO PLAY CIRCUS BOY FOR RINGMASTER VINCE. SOUNDED MOST LIKE UNWELCOMED NEWS, OUTTA FEAR THEY'D WASTE OR BURY THE GUY. THEY MAY WELL BE WASTING HIM, BUT THE MILLION DOLLAR MAN ROUTINE GET'S THE MONDO NOD AS OUR FAVORITE PERSONA GIMMICK OF THE YEAR. THE COMIC TEASER FILMS THEY STARTED WITH WAS THE BEST SCRIPTED STUFF THEY'VE DONE, SOMEHOW THE CHARACTER OF AN OBNOXIOUS, BOORISH LOU WHO THINKS HE CAN BUY ANYONE, FOR HIS OWN CONTEMPT PLEASURES, SEEMS ODDLY APPROPRIATE FOR THE WWF. DON'T KNOW WHY.

BUT THE BEST PART, THAT SUREHANDED MCMAHON MONDO MARK, IS THE BIG BUXX BOY'S BODYGUARD, VIRGIL. WE LOVE VIRGIL AND ALL HE STANDS FOR. DOESN'T THAT RANDOMLY ARRIVED AT APPELATION JUST INVITE UTTER LOATHING? NICE BREAK FOR THIS FORMER PIECE OF NONDESCRIPT MEMPHIS TALENT, WHO HAD A QUESTIONABLE FUTURE IN THE BIZ. WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT A GUY WHO TRADES OFF THE NAME OF SUCH AN ESTEEMED WRESTLER AS S.D. JONES?

HOW MANY HIGHLIGHTS DO YOU REMEMBER FROM 1987? ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS LOWER YOUR STANDARDS..... OUR COMPLETE FASCINATION WITH THE AWA'S MEDUSA MECELI AND HER WELL DESERVE METEORIC RISE IN THE BIZ THIS YEAR CONTINUES.

FROM HOPELESS SHARKEY STUDENT STIFF TO AWA WOMAN'S CHAMPION? GOSH! TALK ABOUT UPWARD MOBILITY! AS A WRESTLER, A THOROUGHLY AWFUL EYE FULL (WITH COSTUMING WORTHY OF A DAVID MCULAIN ACT), BUT AS AN ANIMATED MANNEQUIN, POTENTIALLY SUPERB. TROUBLE STARTS WHEN REQUIRED TO UTTER OVER TWO SENTENCES IN A ROW. CREDIT INDEED GOES TO SHERI MARTELL, WHOSE POSITIVE INFLUENCES WERE PREMATURELY TERMINATED IF ONLY MADUSA COULDA HAD 8 OR 9 MORE YEARS OF CAREFUL TRAINING... MEANWHILE, WHAT PERCOLATING PLOTS THAT ARE HATCHING IN HER HEAD ARE ALMOST AS INTERESTING AS THE REST OF THE BOD. 1988 WILL SEE CONTINUED MONITORING OF THIS GREEK GODDESS WITH THE (ITALIAN NAME, AN INTERNATIONAL DISH TO BE SURE.

..... THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN SAY MORE DISGUSTING ABOUT THE VON BRICH CLAN THAN WHAT THEY DO TO THEMSELVES, OR POINTLESS AND STUPID TOO, SO WE WON'T SAY ANYTHING... BUT IF WE WERE TO...

..... EVEN THOUGH WE TRAVELED TO HOUSTON FOR A FUN CARD AND A MEET WITH SUPER DECENT PAUL BOESCH, AND GOT TO BUY SHERI MARTELL A GLASS OF WINE, THE ABSOLUTE MONDO IN-PERSON HIGHLIGHT OF '87 WAS TO MEET AND MONDO OBSERVE THE ONE OBSTACLE TO TOTAL DISINTEREST IN TODAY'S BIZ, OUR LIFETIME FAVE RAVE, BRUISER BRODY, AUTHOR OF 'THE JOY OF JUICING'. FROLIC SOME FRANK BROUGHT HIS MAGICAL MAYHEM TO MPLS FOR A BIZZARE INDIE CARD LAST SPRING, AND WAS COMPLETELY COMPELLING IN EVERY WAY. THE ENTIRELY UNLIKELY CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE ENTIRE AFFAIR; FROM THE CURIOUS CARD NOW REMEMBERED FOR COL. DEBEER'S NON-APPEARANCE APPEARANCE, WHICH PROVED TO BE HIS LAST, TO THE UNVOLUTIONS OF OUR HERO'S WELL TRAVELED FOREHEAD, THE ADMIRATION FOR THIS DEFINITION OF BRAWLING VIOLENT REALISM WAS FOUND TO BE WELL PLACED BUT WIDELY INADEQUATE. IN THESE DAYS OF SELF-PROCLAIMED LEGENDS, THERE WALKS THE GENUINE ARTICLE! NO GAGA, JUST FACT! OH NO! TONY, WE GOT TO GO!!! TILL NEXT YEAR... MM



7 SAID TO BE  
FUNNYING...

THAT'S  
NOT  
DOING...  
YEAH,  
DAVE'S  
MADE OF  
A ROBERT...

JUST THOUGHT  
YOU WOULD  
ENJOY THESE  
OFFICIAL JCP  
PORTRAITS OF  
THE BEST  
BROTHER ACT  
SINCE WILLIE  
TYLER AND  
LESTER.  
WHY'DJA IT,  
MA?



A VERY  
CHARISMATIC.



## CHAMPIONS OF 1987

### WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION

#### WWF HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Hulk Hogan (def. Iron Sheik January 23, 1984 in New York)

#### INTERCONTINENTAL

1. Randy Savage (def. Tito Santana February, 1986 in Boston)
2. Ricky Steamboat (def. Savage March 29, 1987 in Pontiac, MI)
3. Honkeytonk Man (def. Steamboat June 2, 1987 in Buffalo, NY)

#### WWF TAG TEAM

1. British Bulldogs (def. Greg Valentine & Brutus Beefcake April 7, 1986 in Rosemont, IL)
2. Bret Hart & Jim Neidhart (def. Bulldogs January 26, 1987 in Tampa, FL)
3. Rick Martel & Tito Santana (def. Hart & Neidhart October 27, 1987 in Syracuse)

#### WWF WOMENS

1. Flabulous Moolah (def. Wendi Richter 1985 in New York)
2. Sherri Martel (def. Moolah July 24, 1987 in Houston)

#### WWF WOMENS TAG TEAM

1. Leilani Kai & Judy Martin

### NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE

#### NWA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Ric Flair (def. Dusty Rhodes August 9, 1986 in St. Louis, MO)
2. Ron Garvin (def. Flair August 25, 1987 in Detroit, MI)
3. Ric Flair (def. Garvin November 26, 1987 in Chicago, IL)

#### UNITED STATES

1. Nikita Koloff (won tournament from Magnum T.A. August 1986)
2. Lex Luger (def. Koloff July 11, 1987 in Greensboro, NC)
3. Dusty Rhodes (def. Luger November 26, 1987 in Chicago, IL)

#### NWA TELEVISION

1. Tully Blanchard (def. Dusty Rhodes November 27, 1986 Greensboro, NC)
2. Nikita Koloff (def. Tully Blanchard August 18, 1987 Fayetteville, NC)

#### UWF HEAVYWEIGHT

1. One Man Gang (won by forfeit from Terry Gordy November 1986)
2. Big Bubba Rogers (def. Gang April 19, 1987 in Muskogee, OK)
3. Steve Williams (def. Rogers July 11, 1987 in Oklahoma City, OK)

#### UWF TELEVISION

1. Savannah Jack (def. Buddy Roberts November 1986 in Tulsa, OK)
2. Eddie Gilbert (def. Jack March 8, 1987 in Tulsa, OK)
3. Shane Douglas (def. Gilbert August 3, 1987 in Morgan City, LA)
4. Terry Taylor (def. Douglas September 9, 1987 in Lafayette, LA)
5. Nikita Koloff (def. Taylor November 26, 1987 in Chicago, IL)

When Koloff def. Taylor to unify NWA and UWF TV titles the UWF TV championship was dropped

#### WESTERN STATES

1. Barry Windham (won tournament beating Black Bart June 20, 1987 in Houston, TX)

#### FLORIDA

1. Ron Simmons (def. Kareem Muhammad December 2, 1986 in Tampa, FL)
2. Badnews Allen (def. Simmons January 20, 1987 in Tampa, FL)
3. Sir Oliver Humperdink (def. Allen February 24, 1987 in Tampa, FL)
4. Ed Gantner (Humperdink gave Gantner the title to defend)
5. Mike Rotunda (def. Gantner March 15, 1987 in Daytona Beach, FL)
6. Title held up after May 31, 1987 match between Rotunda and Dory Funk in Orlando
7. Mike Rotunda def. Dory Funk June 7, 1987 in Orlando, FL

#### NWA JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Denny Brown (def. Steve Regal August 2, 1986 in Atlanta, GA)
2. Hectortron (def. Brown March 7, 1987 in Atlanta, GA)
3. Nelson Royal (awarded title in October when Hectortron left the NWA)

#### NWA TAG TEAM

1. Rick Rude & Manny Fernandez (def. Rock & Roll Express December 6, 1987 Atlanta)
2. Rock & Roll Express (awarded titles in June when Rude quit the NWA)
3. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson (def. Rock & Roll September 2, 1987 Meisenheimer)

#### UNITED STATES TAG TEAM

1. Ivan Koloff & Khrusher Khrushchev (won tournament September 1986 in Atlanta)
2. Ron Garvin & Barry Windham (def. Russians December 9, 1986 in Spartanburg)
3. Ivan Koloff & Dick Murdoch (def. Garvin & Windham March 14, 1987 in Atlanta)
4. Murdoch suspended, belts vacated
5. Midnight Express (def. Garvin & Windham in tourney final May 16, 1987 Atlanta)

#### UWF TAG TEAM

1. Jim Duggan & Terry Taylor (def. Bill Irwin & Leroy Brown December 27, 1986 in Fort Worth, Texas)
2. Duggan left area for WWF, belts vacated
3. Terry Taylor & Chris Adams (def. Rick Steiner & Sting in tournament final February 7, 1987 in Fort Worth, Texas)
4. Rick Steiner & Sting (def. Taylor & Adams April 12, 1987 in Atlanta)
5. Brad Armstrong & Tim Horner (def. Steiner & Sting May 17, 1987 in Tulsa)
6. Sheepherders (def. Armstrong & Horner October 16, 1987 in Kansas City)
7. NWA dropped belts in December

#### FLORIDA TAG TEAM

1. Sean Royal & Chris Champion (won tournament final from Kendall Windham & Vic Steamboat December 25, 1986 in Tampa)
2. Tracy Smothers & Steve Armstrong (def. Royal & Champion February 21, 1987 in Sarasota, FL)
3. Mod Squad (def. Smothers & Armstrong March 15, 1987 in Daytona Beach)
4. Mike Graham & Steve Keirn (def. Mod Squad May 17, 1987 in Daytona Beach)
5. Sheepherders (def. Graham & Keirn June 23, 1987 in Tampa)
6. Mike Graham & Steve Keirn (def. Sheepherders August 29, 1987 in St. Petersburg)
7. Mighty Yankees (def. Graham & Keirn September 8, 1987 in Tampa)
8. Mike Graham & Steve Keirn (awarded belts after fictitious win)
9. NWA dropped belts in November

#### NWA 6-MAN

1. Dusty Rhodes & Road Warriors

#### CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING ASSOCIATION

##### SOUTHERN

1. Jerry Lawler
2. Lawler vacated title after being "injured"
3. Austin Idol (def. S.T. Jones in tournament final February 3, 1987 in Memphis)
4. Jerry Lawler (def. Idol April 20, 1987 in Memphis)
5. Austin Idol (def. Lawler April 27, 1987 in Memphis)
6. Jerry Lawler (def. Idol June 8, 1987 in Memphis)
7. The Prince (def. Lawler July 6, 1987 in Memphis)
8. Jerry Lawler (def. Prince July 13, 1987 in Memphis)
9. Belt held up after August 3, 1987 tag match between Lawler and Don Bass
10. Don Bass def. Lawler August 24, 1987 in Memphis
11. Jerry Lawler (def. Bass August 31, 1987 in Memphis)
12. Lawler vacated title after capturing AWA tag team title
13. Bobby Jagers (def. Billy Travis in tournament final October 19, 1987 in Memphis)
14. Jerry Lawler (def. Jagers November 21, 1987 in Memphis)
15. CWA dropped belt to form CWA title which Lawler won on December 7, 1987

##### INTERNATIONAL

1. Big Bubba
2. S.T. Jones (def. Bubba January 4, 1987 in Memphis)
3. Chic Donovan (def. Jones April 20, 1987 in Memphis)
4. Bill Dundee (def. Donovan May 30, 1987 in Nashville)
5. George Barnes (def. Dundee August 17, 1987 in Memphis)
6. Bill Dundee (def. Barnes August 31, 1987 in Memphis)
7. Dundee vacated title after capturing AWA tag team title
8. Billy Travis won tournament October 27, 1987 in Nashville)
9. Manny Fernandez (def. Travis November 2, 1987 in Memphis)
10. CWA dropped belt in December

##### MID AMERICAN

1. Moondog Spot (arrived in area as champion in May)
2. Jeff Jarrett (def. Spot May 11, 1987 in Memphis)
3. Moondog Spot (def. Jarrett May 23, 1987 in Memphis)
4. Jeff Jarrett (def. Spot June 1, 1987 in Memphis)
5. Moondog Spot (def. Jarrett June 8, 1987 in Memphis)
6. Jeff Jarrett (def. Spot June 22, 1987 in Memphis)
7. Carl Fergie (def. Jarrett September 7, 1987 in Memphis)
8. Jeff Jarrett (def. Fergie September 14, 1987 in Memphis)
9. Jimmy Jack Funk (def. Jarrett November 2, 1987 in Memphis)
10. Jeff Jarrett (def. Funk November 9, 1987 in Memphis)
11. CWA dropped belt in December

##### SOUTHERN TAG TEAM

1. Rock & Roll RPMs (def. Jeff Jarrett & Billy Travis December 13, 1986 Memphis)
2. Jeff Jarrett & Billy Travis (def. RPMs January 11, 1987 in Memphis)
3. Rock & Roll RPMs (def. Jarrett & Travis January 20, 1987 in Memphis)
4. Jeff Jarrett & Billy Travis (def. RPMs January 26, 1987 in Memphis)
5. Big Bubba & Goliath (def. Jarrett & Travis February 23, 1987 in Memphis)
6. Rocky Johnson & S.T. Jones (def. Bubba & Goliath April 6, 1987 in Memphis)
7. Chic Donovan & Jack Hart (def. Johnson & Jones May 4, 1987 in Memphis)
8. Donovan left area in late May vacating titles
9. Mark Starr & Billy Travis (def. Phil Hickerson & Mr. Shima in tournament June 8, 1987 in Memphis)
10. The Clones (def. Starr & Travis July 6, 1987 in Memphis)



11. One of the Clones injured, belts vacated
12. Jeff Jarrett & Billy Travis (won tournament beating Pat Tanaka & Paul Diamond July 11, 1987 in Jackson)
13. Pat Tanaka & Paul Diamond (def. Jarrett & Travis August 2, 1987 in Jackson)
14. Nasty Boys (def. Tanaka & Diamond September 12, 1987 in Memphis)
15. Rock & Roll RPMs (def. Nasty Boys September 19, 1987 in Memphis)
16. Nasty Boys (def. RPMs October 3, 1987 in Memphis)
17. Rock & Roll RPMs (def. Nasty Boys October 10, 1987 in Memphis)
18. Midnight Rockers (def. RPMs October 26, 1987 in Memphis)
19. Rock & Roll RPMs (def. Midnight Rockers November 16, 1987 in Memphis)
20. Midnight Rockers (def. RPMs November 22, 1987 in Memphis)

#### INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM

1. Pat Tanaka & Paul Diamond (def. Akio Sato & Tarzan Goto December 15, 1986 Memphis)
2. Shepherders (def. Tanaka & Diamond January 10, 1987 in Nashville)
3. Akio Sato & Tarzan Goto (def. Shepherders)
4. Jimmy Snuka & J.T. Southern (def. Sato & Goto March 2, 1987 in Memphis)
5. Snuka never returned to Memphis, titles vacated
6. The Mercenaries (arrived with belts April 25, 1987)
7. Steve Keirn & Mark Starr (def. Mercenaries April 27, 1987 in Memphis)
8. Pat Tanaka & Paul Diamond (def. Keirn & Starr May 2, 1987 in Memphis)
9. Bill Dundee & Rocky Johnson (def. Tanaka & Diamond July 6, 1987 in Memphis)
10. CWA dropped belts in September

#### WORLD CLASS CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING

##### WCWA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Kevin Von Erich (def. Black Bart in October 1986, Dallas)
2. Al Perez (won title via forfeit August 21, 1987 in Dallas)

##### TEXAS

1. Bob Bradley (def. Dingo Warrior November 27, 1987 in Dallas)
2. Dingo Warrior (def. Bradley February 2, 1987 in Dallas)
3. Dingo Warrior left territory, came back, and left again
4. Al Perez awarded title in fictitious match from Dingo
5. Perez vacated title upon winning WCWA title
6. Ted Arcidi won title August 31, 1987 in Fort Worth Battle Royal
7. Matt Borne (def. Arcidi in fictitious match in November)

##### WCWA LIGHTHEAVYWEIGHT

1. Eric Embry (awarded title in September)
2. Schauna Simpson (def. Embry November 26, 1987 in Dallas)
3. Eric Embry (def. Simpson December 25, 1987 in Dallas)

##### WCWA TAG TEAM

1. Al Madril & Brian Adias (def. Lance Von Erich & Dingo Warrior December 1, 1986 in Fort Worth)
2. The Fantastics (def. Madril & Adias March 4, 1987 in Lubbock)
3. Belts held up between Fantastics and RPMs after April 6, 1987 bout in Fort Worth
4. Fantastics def. RPMs May 4, 1987 in Fort Worth
5. Eric Embry & Frankie Lancaster (def. Fantastics June 21, 1987 in Dallas)
6. Belts held up between Embry & Lancaster and Simpsons August 21, 1987 in Dallas
7. Schauna & Steve Simpson def. Embry & Lancaster September 7, 1987 in Fort Worth
8. Steve Simpson injured, Schauna picks Sweet Brown Sugar as partner
9. Brian Adias & Frankie Lancaster (def. Sugar & Simpson October 19, 1987 Fort Worth)
10. Kevin & Kerry Von Erich (def. Adias & Lancaster November 25, 1987 Shreveport)

##### TEXAS TAG TEAM

1. Tony Atlas & Sweet Brown Sugar (won tournament June 29, 1987 in Fort Worth)

##### WCWA 6-MAN

1. Kevin & Lance & Mike Von Erich
2. Belts vacated when Mike died and Lance quit the promotion
3. Kevin Von Erich & Steve Simpson & Chris Adams def. Terry Gordy & Buddy Roberts & King Parsons for vacant belts December 25, 1987 in Dallas

#### AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION

##### AWA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Nick Bockwinkel (awarded title via forfeit from Stan Hansen June 1986)
2. Curt Hennig (def. Bockwinkel May 2, 1987 in San Francisco)

##### AWA TV

1. Greg Gagne (won tournament over Adrian Adonis December 27, 1987 in Las Vegas)

##### AWA WOMENS

1. Sherri Martel (def. Candi Divine in Oakland May 1986)
2. Martel left area for WWF vacating title
3. Madusa Maceli def. Candi Divine for title December 27, 1987 in Las Vegas

##### AWA TAG TEAM

1. Buddy Rose & Doug Somers (def. Curt Hennig & Scott Hall 1986)
2. Midnight Rockers (def. Rose & Somers January 27, 1987 in Bloomington)
3. Soldat Ustinov & Boris Zhukov (def. Rockers May 25, 1987 in Lake Tahoe, NV)
4. Zhukov left for WWF, Ustinov & Doug Somers awarded titles in October
5. Jerry Lawler & Bill Dundee (def. Ustinov & Somers October 11, 1987 in Memphis)

6. Hector Guerrero & Dr. Diablo (def. Lawler & Dundee October 19, 1987 Memphis)
7. Jerry Lawler & Bill Dundee (def. Guerrero & Diablo October 26, 1987 Memphis)
8. Dennis Condrey & Randy Rose (def. Lawler & Dundee October 30, 1987 in Whitewater, WI)

#### NEW JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

##### IWGP

1. Antonio Inoki (def. Dick Murdoch June 12, 1986 Tokyo)

##### IWGP JR. HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Shiro Koshinaka (def. Nobuhiko Takada September 1986 Tokyo)
2. Koshinaka broke his ankle, title vacated
3. Kuniaki Kobayashi (def. Nobuhiko Takada in tourney final August 20, 1987 Tokyo)
4. Hiroshi Hase (def. Kobayashi December 27, 1987 Tokyo)

##### IWGP TAG TEAM

1. Tatsumi Fujinami & Kengo Kimura (def. Akira Maeda & Osamu Kido September 1986)
2. Fujinami & Kimura split up vacating titles
3. Keiji Muto & Shiro Koshinaka (def. Akira Maeda & Nobuhiko Takada in tournament final March 20, 1987 Tokyo)
4. Akira Maeda & Nobuhiko Takada (def. Muto & Koshinaka March 26, 1987 Tokyo)
5. Kazuo Yamazaki & Yoshiaki Fujiwara (def. Maeda & Takada September 1, 1987 in Fukuoka)

#### ALL JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

##### PWF

1. Riki Choshu (def. Stan Hansen April 1986 Tokyo)
2. Riki Choshu left promotion, title vacated
3. Stan Hansen def. Hiroshi Wajima to win title April 27, 1987 in Yokohama

##### International

1. Jumbo Tsuruta (def. Stan Hansen October 21, 1986 in Tokyo)

##### United National

1. Genichiro Tenryu (def. Ted DiBiase April 26, 1986 in Omiya)

##### PWF JR. HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Kuniaki Kobayashi (def. Masa Fuchi)
2. Masa Fuchi (def. Kobayashi January 3, 1987 in Tokyo)

##### PWF TAG TEAM

1. Stan Hansen & Ted DiBiase (awarded titles in 1985 when Bruiser Brody left)
2. Jumbo Tsuruta & Tiger Mask (def. Hansen & DiBiase July 3, 1987 in Tokyo)
3. Stan Hansen & Ted DiBiase (def. Tsuruta & Tiger July 11, 1987 in Yonago)
4. Ted DiBiase left territory for WWF vacating title
5. Genichiro Tenryu & Ashura Hara def. Stan Hansen & Austin Idol to become champions September 3, 1987 in Nagoya)

##### INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM

1. Riki Choshu & Yoshiaki Yatsu (def. Jumbo Tsuruta & Genichiro Tenryu February 5, 1986 in Sapporo)
2. Jumbo Tsuruta & Genichiro Tenryu (def. Choshu & Yatsu February 5, 1987 in Sapporo)
3. Road Warriors (def. Tsuruta & Tenryu March 12, 1987 in Tokyo)

#### ALL JAPAN WOMEN

##### WWWA

1. Yukari Omori (def. Devil Masami in Tokyo 1986)
2. Chigusa Nagayo (def. Omori October 20, 1987 in Tokyo)

##### ALL PACIFIC TITLE

1. Leilani Kai (def. Chigusa Nagayo for title 1986)
2. Chigusa Nagayo (def. Kai April 27, 1987 in Osaka)
3. Title dropped when Chigusa unified it defeating Omori October 20, 1987

##### WWWA TAG TEAM

1. Dump Matsumoto & Bull Nakano (def. Chigusa Nagayo & Kazue Nagahori 1986)
2. titles held up after Matsumoto & Nakano vs. JB Angels January 9, 1987 Yokohama)
3. Hisako Uno & Yumiko Hotta def. Judy Martin & Leilani Kai to win tournament final April 15, 1987 Tokyo)
4. Yumi Ogura & Kazue Nagahori (def. Uno & Hotta April 27, 1987 in Osaka)
5. Bull Nakano & Condor Saito (def. Ogura & Nagahori October 20, 1987 in Tokyo)

#### PACIFIC NORTHWEST

##### NORTHWEST

1. Rip Oliver (def. The Assassin December 13, 1986 in Portland)
2. Ricky Santana (def. Oliver March 21, 1987 in Portland)
3. Rip Oliver (def. Santana April 18, 1987 in Portland)
4. Mike Miller (def. Oliver June 27, 1987 in Portland)
5. Title held up between Miller and Oliver August 15, 1987 in Portland
6. Mike Miller won title via forfeit when Oliver no-showed August 22, 1987 Portland
7. The Grappler (def. Miller October 31, 1987 in Portland)

##### NORTHWEST TAG TEAM

1. Mike Miller & Abbuda Dein



2. Ricky Santana & Coco Samoa (def. Miller & Dein January 17, 1987 in Portland)
3. Mike Miller & Rip Oliver (def. Santana & Samoa March 6, 1987 in Portland)
4. Miller & Oliver split up May 1, 1987, belts vacated
5. Mike Miller & Coco Samoa def. Rip Oliver & Moondog Morretti for titles May 23, 1987 in Portland)
6. Rip Oliver & Super Ninja (def. Miller & Samoa July 17, 1987 in Portland)
7. Oliver left area for WWF, Ninja chose Joey Jackson as partner in September
8. Steve Doll & Scott Peterson (def. Ninja & Jackson November 7, 1987 in Portland)

#### NORTHWEST TV

1. Art Barr won Battle Royal for newly created title November 21, 1987 Portland
2. Abbuda Dein (def. Barr December 26, 1987 in Portland)

#### STAMPEDE

#### NORTH AMERICAN

1. Makhan Singh
2. Owen Hart (def. Singh January 19, 1987 in Medicine Hat)
3. Makhan Singh (def. Hart January 30, 1987 in Calgary)
4. Owen Hart (def. Singh April 10, 1987 in Calgary)

#### BRITISH COMMONWEALTH MID-HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Owen Hart
2. Great Gama (def. Hart August 7, 1987 in Calgary)

#### INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM

1. Viet Cong Express (def. Owen Hart & Ben Bassarab)
2. Viet Cong #2 suffered heart attack, titles vacated
3. Bruce Hart & Brian Pillman def. Ron Starr & Cuban Assassin to win titles April 5, 1987 in Calgary tournament
4. Titles held up between Hart & Pillman vs. Makhan Singh & Jerry Morrow on October 9, 1987
5. Bruce Hart & Brian Pillman def. Makhan Singh & Jerry Morrow for titles November 13, 1987 in Calgary

#### CONTINENTAL

#### CONTINENTAL

1. Kevin Sullivan (def. The Bullet December 15, 1986 in Birmingham)
2. Ron Fuller (def. Sullivan in fictitious match)
3. Buddy Landel (def. Fuller February 28, 1987 in Chattanooga)
4. Wendell Cooley (def. Landel April 27, 1987 in Birmingham)
5. Cooley "retired" in October, vacating title
6. Dutch Mantell def. Wendell Cooley in tournament final October 30, 1987 Knoxville

#### SOUTHEASTERN

1. Adrian Street (def. Rip Rogers December 29, 1987 in Birmingham)
2. Dutch Mantell (def. Street April 10, 1987 in Birmingham)
3. Danny Davis (def. Mantell November 23, 1987 in Montgomery)
4. Humongous (def. Davis December 25, 1987 in Knoxville)

#### ALABAMA

1. Tony Anthony
2. Wendell Cooley (def. Anthony January 12, 1987 in Birmingham)
3. Title forgotten
4. Mike Golden arrived as champion in April
5. Mr. Wrestling II (def. Golden April 27, 1987 in Birmingham)
6. Mike Golden (def. Mr. Wrestling II)
7. The Bullet (won title in tag match June 22, 1987 in Birmingham)
8. Tony Anthony (def. Bullet October 19, 1987 in Birmingham)
9. Tom Prichard (def. Anthony October 26, 1987 in Birmingham)

#### U.S. JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Tom Prichard
2. Larry Hamilton (def. Prichard January 19, 1987 in Birmingham)
3. Tom Prichard (def. Hamilton February 27, 1987 in Knoxville)
4. Scott Armstrong (def. Prichard April 27, 1987 in Birmingham)
5. Larry Hamilton (def. Armstrong September 7, 1987 in Birmingham)

#### CONTINENTAL TAG TEAM

1. Ken Wayne & Danny Davis (def. Jerry Stubbs & Tony Anthony December 25, 1986 in Birmingham)
2. Jerry Stubbs & Tony Anthony (def. Wayne & Davis February 23, 1987 Birmingham)
3. Robert Fuller & Jimmy Golden (def. Stubbs & Anthony April 27, 1987 Birmingham)

#### TENNESSEE

1. Doug Furnas won tournament for new title July 17, 1987 beating Tony Anthony

#### WORLD WRESTLING COUNCIL

1. Carlos Colon
2. Hercules Ayala (def. Colon July 18, 1987 in San Juan)
3. Carlos Colon (def. Ayala September 20, 1987 in San Juan)

#### NORTH AMERICAN

1. Bob Heffernan (won via forfeit from Jos LeDuc December 21, 1986 in San Juan)
2. Miguel Perez Jr. (def. Heffernan January 21, 1987 in Catano)

3. TNT (def. Perez May 16, 1987 in Bayamon)

#### PUERTO RICAN

1. Miguel Perez Jr.
2. Mighty Igor (def. Perez January 9, 1987 in San Juan)
3. Kareem Muhammad (def. Igor June 6, 1987 in Guaynabo)

#### WWC WOMENS

1. Wendi Richter def. Rhonda Singh in Trinidad to win new title

#### WWC JR. HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Invader #3
2. Frankie Lancaster (def. Invader #3 March 11, 1987 in Guaynabo)
3. Invader #3 (def. Lancaster May 3, 1987 in San Juan)
4. El Gran Mendoza (def. Invader #3 July 6, 1987 in San Juan)
5. Hurricane Castillo Jr. (def. Mendoza September 20, 1987 in San Juan)
6. El Gran Mendoza (def. Castillo October 7, 1987 in Catano)

#### WWC TAG TEAM

1. Ron & Chicky Starr
2. Mark & Chris Youngblood (def. Starrs January 6, 1987 in San Juan)
3. Shepherders (def. Youngbloods April 4, 1987 in Caguas)
4. Mark & Chris Youngblood (def. Shepherders May 10, 1987 in San Juan)
5. TNT & Mr. Pogo (def. Youngbloods July 11, 1987 in Caguas)
6. Mark & Chris Youngblood (def. Pogo & TNT late July)
7. The Hunters (def. Youngbloods August 26, 1987 in Trinidad)
8. Mark & Chris Youngblood (def. Hunters September 20, 1987 in San Juan)
9. Kendo Nagasaki & Mr. Pogo (def. Youngbloods October 17, 1987 in Caguas)

#### NORTH AMERICAN TAG TEAM

1. Al Perez & Big Red Reese
2. Bob Heffernan & El Gran Mendoza (def. Perez & Reese January 6, 1987 in San Juan)
3. Tony Atlas & Miguel Perez Jr. (def. Heffernan & Mendoza April 25, 1987 Caguas)
4. The Hunters (def. Atlas & Perez June 20, 1987 in San Juan)
5. Hunters left area in November, belts vacated

#### CENTRAL STATES

##### CENTRAL STATES

1. Sam Houston (won tournament beating Jimmy Garvin in finals)
2. Bill Dundee (def. Houston January 3, 1987 in Topeka)
3. Bob Brown (def. Dundee February 27, 1987 in Kansas City)
4. Rufus Jones (def. Brown May 14, 1987 in Kansas City)
5. Porkchop Cash (def. Jones July 10, 1987 in St. Joseph)
6. Rufus Jones (def. Cash)
7. Earthquake Ferris (def. Jones September 29, 1987 in Des Moines)
8. Bob Brown (def. Ferris October 30, 1987 in St. Joseph)
9. Dave Peterson (def. Brown December 25, 1987 in St. Joseph)

##### CENTRAL STATES TV

1. Vinnie Valentino def. Rip Rogers July 16, 1987 to win tournament in Kansas City
2. Rip Rogers (def. Valentino September 28, 1987 in Des Moines)
3. Mike George (awarded title in fictitious match when Rogers left area)

##### CENTRAL STATES TAG TEAM

1. Todd Champion & Dave Peterson (def. Thunderfoots)
2. Mod Squad (def. Peterson & Champion January 2, 1987 in Kansas City)
3. Ric McCord & Bart Batten (def. Mod Squad February 27, 1987 in Kansas City)
4. Porkchop Cash & Ken Timbs (def. McCord & Batten April 10, 1987 in Kansas City)
5. Ken Timbs left area vacating titles
6. Warlord & Karl Kovacs won tournament June 8, 1987 in Wichita
7. Warlord & Kovacs both left territory vacating titles
8. Bart & Brad Batten def. Bobby Jaggers & Sam Cody August 6, 1987 in Kansas City to win vacated belts
9. Ric McCord & Porkchop Cash (def. Battens in fictitious match when Battens left territory)
10. Mike Stone & Ric Patterson (def. McCord & Cash November 26, 1987 Kansas City)

#### OTHERS

Florida Southern: 1. Lex Luger; 2. Kevin Sullivan; 3. Badnews Allen; 4. Kevin Sullivan (belt dropped in March)

Bahamas: 1. The Falcon; 2. Badnews Allen (belt dropped in March)

Texas TV: 1. Tony Atlas (belt dropped in March)

Montreal International: 1. David Shults; 2. Hercules Ayala; 3. Abdullah the Butcher (promotion folded)

International tag team: 1. Kendo Nagasaki & Richard Charland; 2. Dan Kroffat & Armand Rougeau; 3. Chuck Simms & Richard Charland (promotion folded)



# 1987 WRESTLING OBSERVER RATINGS

The ratings here are based on the results of our annual survey of 30 responding pro wrestling experts. The wrestlers spot in the poll is listed on the left. On the right is where the wrestler finished in previous years polls. These ratings are based strictly on in-ring ability and work-rate.

	86	85	84	83
1. Ric Flair.....	1	1	1	1
2. Nobuhiko Takada.....	7	27	21	--
3. Owen Hart.....	27	--	--	--
4. Barry Windham.....	11	67	25	36
5. Akira Maeda.....	10	13	24	--
6. Bobby Eaton.....	5	9	56	73
7. Ted DiBiase.....	2	3	20	8
8. Tatsumi Fujinami.....	3	7	8	16
9. Masa Saito.....	--	--	15	24
10. Ricky Steamboat.....	8	12	10	21
11. Tiger Mask.....	12	14	29	--
12. Curt Hennig.....	59	--	--	--
13. Tully Blanchard.....	13	25	61	70
Riki Choshu.....	9	6	6	13
15. Rick Martel.....	38	18	35	66
16. Kazuo Yamazaki.....	--	--	70	--
17. Bret Hart.....	15	37	48	--
18. Terry Taylor.....	18	29	65	--
19. Randy Savage.....	19	10	18	55
20. Brad Armstrong.....	25	39	63	--
21. Eddie Gilbert.....	62	73	--	--
22. Pat Tanaka.....	--	--	--	--
23. Ricky Morton.....	21	54	--	--
24. Yoshiaki Fujiwara....	45	45	68	--
25. Shiro Koshinaka.....	50	--	--	--
26. Bruiser Brody.....	20	5	3	2
27. Genichiro Tenryu.....	22	22	67	--
28. Keiichi Yamada.....	65	--	--	--
29. Keiji Muto.....	39	58	--	--
30. Terry Gordy.....	6	8	11	9
31. Dick Murdoch.....	36	30	51	73
32. Hiroshi Hase.....	--	--	--	--
33. Buzz Sawyer.....	17	50	47	23
34. Steve Williams.....	14	38	--	--
35. Arn Anderson.....	46	70	--	--
36. Negro Casas.....	31	--	--	--
37. Stan Hansen.....	26	4	9	7
38. Kengo Kimura.....	44	49	39	--
39. Pirata Morgan.....	52	51	--	--
40. Yoshiaki Yatsu.....	4	19	30	57
Sam Houston.....	40	--	--	--
42. Stan Lane.....	--	--	--	--
43. Jumbo Tsuruta.....	32	33	38	28
44. Bam Bam Bigelow.....	33	--	--	--
45. Sting.....	--	--	--	--
46. El Hijo Del Santo....	56	--	--	--
47. Kuniaki Kobayashi....	16	20	32	--
Barry Orton.....	--	--	--	--
49. Jeff Jarrett.....	--	--	--	--
50. Badnews Allen.....	53	69	40	--
51. Masaharu Funaki.....	--	--	--	--
52. Rick Steiner.....	69	--	--	--
53. Hector Guerrero.....	57	47	--	--
54. Tom Prichard.....	--	--	--	--
55. Billy Travis.....	--	--	--	--
56. Harley Race.....	61	31	27	15
Tim Horner.....	72	--	--	--
58. Hiro Saito.....	28	46	--	--
59. Super Strong Machine..	60	65	--	--
60. Tito Santana.....	--	--	--	44
61. Shawn Michaels.....	--	--	--	--
Chris Champion.....	--	--	--	--
63. Jerry Lawler.....	63	61	57	33
64. Jason the Terrible....	--	--	--	--
65. Shunji Takano.....	58	--	--	--
66. Super Astro.....	--	--	--	--
67. George Takano.....	54	26	12	--
68. Chris Adams.....	--	11	58	53
Islander Tama.....	--	--	--	--

	86	85	84	83
70. Ashura Hara.....	--	--	--	--
71. Davey Boy Smith....	23	17	5	--
72. Brian Pillman.....	--	--	--	--
73. Tommy Rogers.....	47	--	--	--
74. Dennis Condrey.....	66	66	--	--
75. Road Warrior Hawk..	--	--	--	--

Remainder of the top 100: Dick Slater, Manny Fernandez, Biff Wellington, Marty Janetty, Robert Gibson, Konga the Barbarian, Shinichi Nakano, Jake Roberts, Big Bubba Rogers, Bob Orton, Atlantis, TNT, Michael Hayes, Toshiaki Kawada, Islander Haku, Wendell Cooley, Dutch Mantell, Paul Diamond, Ron Garvin, Johnny Smith, Chris Benoit, Paul Orndorff, Matt Borne, Jacques Rougeau, Norio Honaga, Danny Davis (Continental version of course)

**RATINGS NOTES:** This year's poll marks seven years in a row that Ric Flair has been rated No. 1 and nine years that Flair has been rated in the top five, which is how long the annual poll has been in existence. Flair was rated No. 1 on 20 of the 30 ballots, so he fell off slightly from 1986 when he was rated No. 1 on 28 of 32 ballots. Nobuhiko Takada was ranked No. 1 on six ballots, Owen Hart on two while the other first place votes went to Riki Choshu and Ted DiBiase. . . The highest rated newcomer is Masa Saito, who finished in the top 10 for the first time at the age of 45, which is an amazing accomplishment. Saito was out of the ratings the past two years since he was in prison in Wisconsin. Certainly his return to the wrestling wars has to rate as the comeback story of the year. . . Pat Tanaka at No. 22 is the highest ranked wrestler making the top 75 for the first time. . . Just to show how impressive Flair's career has been, Fujinami is the only other wrestler who has even been ranked in the top 10 for four consecutive years. . . Girl wrestlers Chigusa Nagayo, Lioness Asuka and Dump Matsumoto actually had enough points to qualify, but it would be unfair to rank them among the men since many people also left them off the ballots. In fact, Nagayo was in the top 10 on almost half the ballots, but not even listed on the others so whatever rating the girls would have gotten would be an incorrect indication anyway. If interest stays high, we will rate women next year. . . The highest rated wrestlers from last years poll to drop out were Chavo Guerrero, No. 24, who has fallen out of the mainstream and only works sparingly for independents; Dynamite Kid, No. 29, who was a perennial top 10 before injuries caught up with him; Jim Duggan, No. 30, who went to the WWF which is self-explanatory and Magnum T.A., No. 34, who was the victim of a terrible auto accident. . . The NWA tops the list with 17 wrestlers of the top 75, with New Japan following with 16, WWF with 10, All Japan with seven, Mexico, Stampede and CWA with four; World Class and AWA with three, Continental with one and five wrestlers, Akira Maeda, Kazuo Yamazaki, Barry Orton, Shunji Takano and Pat Tanaka unaffiliated.

## 1987 WRESTLING OBSERVER AWARDS

CATEGORY A AWARDS -- WINNERS JUDGED ON TOTAL POINTS, FIVE POINTS FOR EACH FIRST PLACE VOTE, THREE POINTS FOR EACH SECOND PLACE VOTE AND TWO POINTS FOR EACH THIRD PLACE VOTE

### WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

1. RIKI CHOSHU (135) . . . . . 1,042
2. Ric Flair (132) . . . . . 1,005
3. Hulk Hogan (59) . . . . . 647
4. Ted DiBiase (16) . . . . . 206
5. Chigusa Nagayo (16) . . . . . 205

Honorable Mention: Randy Savage 203, Genichiro Tenryu 149, Owen Hart 138, Nobuhiko Takada 90, Barry Windham 68, Curt Hennig 65

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Harley Race  
1981 - Ric Flair  
1982 - Ric Flair  
1983 - Ric Flair  
1984 - Ric Flair  
1985 - Ric Flair  
1986 - Ric Flair

There's no clear-cut winner this year, but several legitimate candidates. Let's examine their qualifications:

\*Ric Flair--For all-around work on a night-after-night basis, Flair is still the best in the United States. While he can be faulted somewhat for a stale routine in the ring, with the calibre of opponents he spent most of this past year with, there's little room for improvisation. You can't credit him enough for carrying the likes of Ron Garvin and Nikita Koloff and actually having good matches with them. His work against Garvin, spending several months getting his chest slapped to hamburger meat, shows a lot of heart, dedication to realism and perhaps some insanity. Given the amount of interviews he had to do, his work can't be faulted. Once again, there are days he's stale, but there are plenty of days his mike work was extraordinary. But positive impact on the game? I suppose the NWA would have been worse off without him, but I don't know if that's a strong enough qualification.

\*Riki Choshu--A good worker to be sure, whose impact comes mainly from his move from All Japan to New Japan. Virtually every major angle that took place in Japan in 1987 in some way can be attributed to Choshu's jump. Remember, Choshu's jump not only had a strong bearing on the balance of power between two promotions, but was the catalyst in forcing Genichiro Tenryu to turn heel in All Japan, which was their biggest angle of the year, and eventually caused the return of Bruiser Brody and Abdullah the Butcher to Japan. In addition, Choshu's jump led to the Antonio Inoki vs. Masa Saito feud, Japan's biggest money feud of the year. He also made headlines because of the

incident where Akira Maeda kicked him in the face. Even the decline of Yoshiaki Yatsu, who in my mind was Japan's best wrestler of 1986, can be attributed to Choshu's leaving and his taking it easy on training. And what about the retirement of Animal Hamaguchi? This guy's impact just can't be overlooked. The question here is, was it positive impact? For the most part, the answer is no, as many Japanese fans viewed his jump back as double-crossing and it hurt the image of pro wrestling. But he surely belongs in the top three, in the No. 2 slot.

\*Hulk Hogan--Everyone knows the argument here. Hogan is the biggest box office draw in the game. When he's on the card, the crowd size generally triples or quadruples its normal size. The WWF is the most successful North American national promotion of this era, and Hogan's importance to that can't be emphasized enough. But his work? Hogan isn't awful, but he's below average. By and large his matches are okay, but they are more predictable than Flair's, much shorter, with a far less variety of moves, and he's generally working with foes as good or better than Flair's foes. I can't pick him first, because I consider work in the ring a must for a first place pick, but he has to be in the top three. Because of the success of Wrestlemania and the Survivor Series, he gets my No. 3 pick.

\*Owen Hart--In truth, I didn't even consider him until lots of folks started making good arguments on his behalf. His work is great. His matches are always good and often great, and he's proven he can carry just about anyone and work a decent match with them. I guess the thing that made me consider him was when someone pointed out to me just how much more extensive our coverage of Stampede Wrestling has become in the last year, how much demand there is for Stampede Wrestling tapes, and even how the Apter-mags are giving this forgotten circuit significant coverage of late. Hart didn't put Stampede Wrestling on the map as far as good wrestling, because it has had good wrestling for years. But he did put the promotion on the map in the past year in regards to fans recognition.

\*Curt Hennig--A great performer but I can't consider him here. He may be the best thing in the AWA, but he hasn't significantly given the promotion more fans or more respect nationally from the fans.



\*Randy Savage--Impact, yes. Ability, certainly. Consistent work, well that has always been his down point. As the year comes to a close, Savage is probably the No. 2 drawing card in the U.S. His angles got over well, and his turn, while slow in coming, was generally effective. He probably deserves mention, but he's basically just filled a role as No. 2 babyface. The WWF would have done just as well this year without Savage as it did with him. You can't say that for the NWA without Flair, WWF without Hogan, New Japan without Choshu, Stampede without Hart or the Japanese women without Chigusa. That's why he doesn't make my top three.

\*Ted DiBiase--Great gimmick and a great worker. He was just getting pushed into the spotlight as the year came to a close. Actually he may win this outright next year, but this year a few guys are more deserving.

\*Barry Windham--Generally great work, but he didn't get over as well as he should have. Maybe it wasn't his fault, but he's just not over enough to qualify.

\*Chigusa Nagayo--All I can say is you have to see her live to appreciate the impact she has. She is not the drawing card Hogan is, but as far as being responsible for numbers of dollars spent on wrestling and wrestling-related merchandising, she may be second to only Hogan. Her work night-after-night is excellent, and has a wider variety of moves than the other candidates, except for Hart. And her best matches of the year were better than the best of just about anyone. Believe me, she is Japanese women's wrestling. The only drawback is she hasn't headlined to any super houses like she did in years past. Still, she meets all the criteria better than anyone else, and gets my first place pick.

\*Genichiro Tenryu--His heel turn was a significant factor in All Japan staying interesting this year. A good worker as well. Still, there are too many deserving candidates for me to place him in the top three.

JEFF BOWDREN: Up until my visit to Japan, I had Choshu picked for No. 1. However, after experiencing the magic of Chigusa live, there really was no doubt. I watched her hold a spell of little Japanese girls, most of whom dressed like her, had their cut like her, and dreamed of being her. Watching those little girls all turn around and put on their Chigusa fan club jackets as the opening chords or her theme song came on showed me that she has something that Hulk Hogan could never have. I'm not sure what it is, but she's got it.

SMM: Flair was solid as always and even though he wrestled a lot of stiff matches this year, he was the best. Maeda started the year off really strong but went downhill at the end.

Obviously New Japan is burying him in the pack but I love his attitude and he works his butt off. I put Bockwinkel third. I just hope at 50+ that I'm in half the shape he's in. Do you realize his 60 minute match with Hennig is equivalent to about two weeks worth of Hogan matches. I don't care if Hulk Hogan is the biggest draw in history or not, he does not deserve consideration.

Mr. MIKE: Not Ric Flair, even though he had the most amazing above-average consistency of anyone, but he was impact lacking. He's allowed himself to be but one member of the Dusty Rhodes geek chorus. Riki Choshu gets first. For a key figure as well as a great wrestler, one who made news, Choshu is pretty easy to pick for first. Even with unfavorable publicity, Choshu has had near equal impact in Japan as Hogan has in the United States, and he's certainly the same as far as public recognition. And it's not a cartoon figure perception. Curt Hennig had a good year. He's important because I really believe he's the only thing between the AWA limping chronically along or utterly losing all remaining support. Who else could the AWA get to fill his shoes? Hennig is quite acceptable on the mike, a good heel, and he's still got room to improve. I won't hold it against him that he's no kind of a draw. Jesus Christ couldn't draw a house in the AWA.

STEVE SIMS: DiBiase probably had the best mix of impact, off the mat news making and in ring performance. Flair was great but very repetitive. Hogan's matches weren't so good, but his impact was so enormous he deserves at least a third place vote.

JOE COUGHLIN: Ric Flair. I don't think the criteria here is completely fair. A wrestler doesn't have much say in his impact on the business. Hulk Hogan would be nowhere without Vince McMahon, and although the reverse is true, it's Vince that called the shot. I don't think impact on the business should be a factor at all in this award. Promoters have the impact on the business.

JOE LILLY: Hulk Hogan has had the greatest impact on pro wrestling this year. The attention that was focused to his match with Andre the Giant at Wrestlemania III was immense. I believe the success of the event was due to Hogan's impact on pro wrestling.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: Trying to relate Choshu's move from All Japan to New Japan would be like Hogan going to Crockett. However, does Hogan have the influence to take so many name wrestlers with him? But the real story is compare New Japan 12 months ago with today. These factors, plus the fact Choshu's matches are top-notch give him the nod.

RYAN CLARK: Choshu single-handedly changed Japanese wrestling. He can't touch Flair as an all-around performer, but who can? But nobody had the impact Choshu had on wrestling in 1987.

SCOTT HUDSON: It would be easy to pick Flair but this year it can't be done. Takada has been awesome all year. He gets first based on ability and a good attitude. If Flair had been used properly, he'd have walked away with it. Owen Hart gets third because there is no better wrestler in North America.

JOHN MCADAM: Of all the active wrestlers, Dusty Rhodes had the most impact on the business, but it was more from his job as booker. Ric Flair had an off year, so I have to rate him second behind the Hulk.

KIM WOOD: Riki Choshu is the charismatic symbol of "fighting spirit" and his jump to New Japan and what happened after the jump was the biggest story of the year. Hogan once again proved his great business value to the best run wrestling business in the world. Masa Saito, in his mid-40s, has also gotten it all together as another symbolic force in the world's best wrestling promotion.

GARY FISHMAN: Ric Flair practically carried the NWA on his back this year by making the babyfaces like the Garvins, Dusty, Nikita, Rotundo, etc. look like legitimate title contenders, if not great wrestlers. His matches with Windham were the best bouts I've ever seen and when teaming with Luger, made Luger appear to be a great wrestler. Hogan makes nobody look good. As a matter of fact, the opposite happens to WWF heels who come across as wasted garbage after being victimized by the superman act. I saw DiBiase in several mediocre matches this year. Flair is never mediocre.

STEVE GERBER: Hulk Hogan is the franchise. Love it or leave it, the WWF is the current barometer of professional wrestling's success. Name another wrestling personality making appearances on prime time television, selling out arenas and helping his company make millions on endorsed products bearing his likeness. The name of the game is success, spelled in dollar signs, and everyone knows America loves a winner.

JOE BECHT: Ric Flair was one of Crockett's few bright spots this year. He gets a great crowd reaction, makes stupid angles somewhat interesting and is always a great performer. Hogan is an average-to-poor worker who sold out the Silverdome and most other major arenas. He's a franchise.

BOB SHATTUCK: The impact Choshu had made me pick him first. Flair

impresses me for several reasons. He made the most out of a bad situation this year. He does great interviews and his ability is great. When I met him in Baltimore he was a perfect gentleman. The night before his match with Windham I saw him drink an incredible amount, and the next day he wrestled the best match I've ever seen live. While I'm not an advocate of heavy drinking, I was impressed.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Who else could survive French kissing a mannequin on national television, having his chest slapped raw, dropping the title on a clean pin, and then still, as a heel, receive a standing ovation from a studio audience upon regaining the title?"

PAUL HANLIN: I picked Owen Hart. He did wonders for a promotion that had zero publicity and zero visibility. He single-handedly transformed it into a well-known promotion. He didn't play superman who never lost. He also didn't play heel champion who never won. He wrestled his tail off both in Calgary and in Japan. In a sport so lacking in honest to God talent, he shined head and shoulders above the rest. Even though Hogan put 90,000 in the Silverdome, I can't forget his lack of ability. Flair just didn't cut it this time out. Flair lost it when he french-kissed that mannequin. He has enough leverage not to do things like that and two other pieces of wisdom called common sense and responsibility. He exercised neither of them.

GARY ZIMAK: Despite the fact he didn't even wrestle on television for the majority of the year, I couldn't justify giving the honor to anyone except Choshu. His jump received more publicity than any other story this year. He turned Inoki's circuit into the best one in the world and he's also one of the best workers around. Flair had his moments, but he didn't have enough impact to rate a first place vote.

JON GALLAGHER: I think it's time to recognize Hogan for what he's done for the sport. His ability to draw 93,000 gives him the top draw honors. He isn't much on interviews, but something got those people out there so that has to be a strong point. I didn't pick him first because he carried Andre for 12 minutes, but because he seemed to work harder in the ring to maintain his status quo. Perhaps Choshu should be No. 1, but the fact remains that a lot of Americans have never heard of him or don't care about him.

TERESA DEMARIE: Sure, most Observer readers can't stand Hogan, but he's crying all the way to the bank. He's an awful wrestler, a bad interview, but when it comes to impact, nobody even comes close. Choshu is the only one who blended impact with ring work, and gets second.



### MOST OUTSTANDING WRESTLER

1. RIC FLAIR (184) . . . . . 1,164
2. Owen Hart (26) . . . . . 655
3. Nobuhiko Takada (79) . . . . . 637
4. Chigusa Nagayo (27) . . . . . 279
5. Ted DiBiase (20) . . . . . 203

Honorable Mention: Barry Windham 201, Akira Maeda 124, Curt Hennig 123, Tatsumi Fujinami 114, Randy Savage 108, Bobby Eaton 104, Genichiro Tenryu 90, Ricky Steamboat 85

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1986 - Ric Flair

After seeing all the candidates live this year except Hart, I've got to pick Flair first for all-around ability. There are many with better moves. But Flair consistently gives you value for your dollar not only in putting on great matches, but putting on an entertaining show. The fact he's done that this year before smaller crowds, with worse opponents, and with an awfully grueling schedule has my utmost respect.

Second place I'm going with Nobuhiko Takada, who I've never seen in a bad match. When I saw him carry the Von Erichs into good matches, he got the slot locked up. I've seen Takada in more four star plus matches this year than anyone else.

Third was tougher, with Chigusa Nagayo edging out Owen Hart. Hart is more spectacular and has a wider variety of moves, but Chigusa's matches are also beyond compare.

JOHN MCADAM: The day Owen Hart gets his ring psychology down he becomes the best in the world. Until that day, Flair is No. 1.

STEVE GERBER: Negro Casas has to be seen to be believed. A match between him and El Hijo Del Santo is what every wrestling fan dreams of, fast moves, non-stop high spots, aerial maneuvers, excellent execution and crowd involvement.

GARY ZIMAK: I really didn't have to think about Takada as the top choice. He is simply a fantastic performer. And he's be even better if he'd drop his desire to make his matches look like shoots. I understand where he's coming from, but I personally enjoy high spots more than submission holds. Despite that, he's the most exciting performer I've seen since Satoru Sayama.

RYAN CLARK: If his peers, of which he really has none, all worked like Flair, most people would still be wondering whether wrestling was real or not. How many wrestlers slide in and out of the ring to break the 10 count when brawling on the floor? How many of them limp for minutes after escaping from a figure four. How many wrestlers have learned to

kick out at 2 3/4 after being decked at the 40 minute mark? Flair's greatness can't be measured in just athletic or wrestling ability. The true measure of Flair can be measured in his ability to entertain a crowd. Whether it's in the ring or in front of a microphone, Flair puts on the type of show that people remember. People used to say that Barnum & Bailey put on the Greatest show on Earth, but they were wrong. That distinction belongs to the Nature Boy.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: When you look at the regular opponents Flair had this past year, only Barry Windham was a top-notch wrestler. His selling made matches with Dusty and Nikita very good, with little help from his opponent.

### BEST BABYFACE

1. HULK HOGAN (275) . . . . . 1,413
2. Chigusa Nagayo (44) . . . . . 370
3. Randy Savage (18) . . . . . 272
4. Jerry Lawler (7) . . . . . 261
5. Road Warriors (3) . . . . . 242
- Riki Choshu . . . . . 242

Honorable Mention: Ricky Steamboat 140, Dusty Rhodes 84, Antonio Inoki 69

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Dusty Rhodes  
1981 - Tommy Rich  
1982 - Hulk Hogan  
1983 - Hulk Hogan  
1984 - Hulk Hogan  
1985 - Hulk Hogan  
1986 - Hulk Hogan

With the criteria being drawing power and ability to generate heat, Hogan has this one locked up. After seeing Chigusa Nagayo live and talking to others who have seen that unbelievable spectacle, for just heat she deserves the nod. But the success of Wrestlemania shows Hogan has far greater drawing power. Really this was one of the easiest first place picks to make.

Equally easy is voting for Chigusa second. You may say she only appeals to teenage girls, but the impact is something even Hogan can't approach. And her drawing power seems to have remained constant with frequent appearances in the same city, something which can't be said of the Road Warriors.

In many ways, the Warriors are not good babyfaces as far as working goes. They do little to generate crowd sympathy. Chigusa is great at this and Hogan works a successful, if predictable and not too athletic style. Their drawing power has gone down, but I'm not blaming them. Others, Owen Hart and Ricky Morton come to mind, are great at generating sympathy, but they don't match up when it comes to drawing power. Still, the Warriors have an audience

which loves them, and it stretches throughout North America and into Japan. For being popular on two continents, I rank the Warriors ahead of Antonio Inoki and Randy Savage for third.

Mr. MIKE: Hulk Hogan. It's all been said. They ought to get a Pulitzer Prize for best fiction.

JEFF BOWDREN: After seeing the reaction Chigusa gets from the girls in person, I believe. It's the most amazing thing I've ever seen in my life.

RYAN CLARK: Chigusa is so effective as a babyface that her fans actually cry out for her. Nobody cries for Hulk Hogan, except, perhaps, his dermatologist.

SCOTT HUDSON: No question about it, Hogan takes first by a wider margin than the space between his ears.

SEAN HENDRICK: It's almost embarrassing how Hogan owns the crowd. I like to compare him to "The Monkees." The uneducated fans went crazy for them, while the educated fans disdained them.

#### BEST HEEL

1. TED DIBIASE (59) . . . . . 630
2. Austin Idol (78) . . . . . 597
3. Dump Matsumoto (57) . . . . . 491
4. Terry Taylor (47) . . . . . 419
5. Ric Flair (53) . . . . . 381

Honorable Mention: Honkeytonk Man 318, Andre the Giant 140, Riki Choshu 113, Curt Hennig 71

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Larry Zbyszko  
1981 - Don Muraco  
1982 - Buzz Sawyer  
1983 - Michael Hayes  
1984 - Roddy Piper  
1985 - Roddy Piper  
1986 - Michael Hayes

This is tougher to judge, because great heels nowadays get cheered, and the meaner they become, the more large segments of the crowd will like them. Some will say they aren't successful heels, but my belief is the crowds are smarter and many of them know and appreciate who the best performers are. Some fans are into this "anti-hero" worship as well.

Ric Flair is almost a perfect heel. He is totally believable in his role and taken seriously by almost all fans. His matches get great dramatic heat, something few performers in the states ever achieve. The audience may not scream wildly, but they react to every move and pop like crazy at the climactic points. Still, that's work where talking about, and Flair's drawing power just isn't what it used to be. It's sad, but true. I picked him for second place.

Riki Choshu as a heel gets tremendous heat, but I've still got too much American in me to pick someone who gets louder cheers than anyone else.

Terry Taylor's work as a heel right after the turn, and once he got his momentum back after the auto accident, was tremendous. The subtle stuff he pulled was great. He developed his own character, in some ways similar to Flair, but more of an arrogant preppy. It was a real-life character that almost everyone could relate to. With the possible exception of Flair, he played the big ego routine with the most believability. But Taylor has been buried in recent months, which of all Virgil's booking mistakes, may have been the biggest. I'd like to pick him, but can't.

Ted DiBiase's Million Dollar Man routine has gotten over tremendous. Now, like Flair, there is something about DiBiase that I find too likeable. They come across as nice guys with "over" personalities. No complaints here. DiBiase plays a cross between Vince McMahon and Ric Flair like an award winning actor. He's almost so good it's scary. But I've seen him live and he didn't get heel of the year heat. Not even close, although like with Wrestler of the Year, I can see him as the leading candidate for next year, because he's going to get the biggest heel push of the year. Still, the heel character is one that every fan knows about and in that way, is over tremendously, but he still just misses my top three.

Not so with Austin Idol. He came off as totally despicable. But again, he didn't do anything in the last six months. At the halfway point of the year, he'd have been my top pick. His work in the Lawler feud was the best heel work of the year. I could almost see picking him for first or second, but third was the highest I could go since he worked a limited role.

Andre the Giant was fantastic this year as a frightening monster-like beast, due mainly to Titan's special effects and camera angles. The success of both Wrestlemania and Survivors Series can't be overlooked, but he only stepped foot into the ring a few times. He's not a wrestler. This is for the guys who earned the award by going out every night, not working three or four terrible matches during a year.

Honkeytonk Man is hated to be sure, and was pushed as Titan's lead heel after the Randy Savage turn. His interviews were colorful and his ring entrance, tremendous. The guy was genuinely hated as well. But I saw him live several times, and every time, once the bell rang, the heat was gone. Someone who can't sustain his heat during a match isn't going to crack my top three.



Dump Matsumoto is an easy first place pick. She combines being a frightful monster-like heel such as an Andre, with a vicious streak like an Abdullah the Butcher, and an ability to get heat at the climactic point of the match like Flair.

If there's one thing Eddie Gilbert was able to prove as a booker, it was that when the spotlight was put on him, that Eddie Gilbert is a great heel. He's developed a character for himself that can survive doing jobs just about every night. He also made the fact he's not a big man as wrestlers go, work to his advantage.

I also want to mention Makhan Singh. The guy was fun to watch and stayed over all year. His interviews were good and he was easy to hate. He spent most of the year working with guys half his size and selling for them and made it look believable. He's not a candidate for the top three but he deserved commendation.

RYAN CLARK: Austin Idol--When you have to call out the entire Memphis police force for crowd control after a match, then it's safe to say the heel did his job effectively.

JOE LANCELLO: Finally a cartoon character for grown-ups. The Million Dollar Man has gone over so well that Ted didn't have to pay me to say this. The arrogance and endless supply of hundred dollar bills appeals to the marks. The same thing makes smart fans think they're seeing Vince McMahon, except with better interviews. Andre got a lot of heat for standing upright and breathing. The last person to do so well with so little was Darth Vader.

JOE LILLY: I never could stand Tommy Rich and Austin Idol as babyfaces, especially Rich. When they turned heel, I found a new respect for both of them. They were fantastic. Their interviews were excellent even if Idol's made sense and Rich's didn't.

Mr. MIKE: I can't pick Andre. He did virtually nothing all year, but did it very well I must say. Dump Matsumoto gets first. When they finally retire her from the Japanese girls scene, she can come her and be the best guy heel. Terry Taylor gets second. He had a tough year, between car wrecks and turkey necks (Virgil), his act was stopped before it really had a chance. Ric Flair certainly was great, and he was a heel, at least by the end of most of his matches, so why not pick him third.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: To give some idea how good I thought Idol was, I gave him first place even though he was a heel less than half the year. I picked Taylor because I found him very convincing in his role. If

there was an award for biggest waste of talent, it would go to Crockett for his misuse of Taylor. Just as he found himself in the role, he was killed off.

TERESA DEMARIE: Taylor is great. A real annoying snotty twist in the vein of Flair, only he's better in some ways. His quiet, rather dull interview style is perfect for a heel when combined with his stuck-up remarks.

GARY ZIMAK: Terry Taylor has the art of being an asshole perfected. His switch was long overdue and his attitude is perfect for his role.

PAUL HANLIN: Honkeytonk is an all-time great at getting heat before the bell rings. Then he needs someone to carry him. The man who should win is Taylor. He came back from a devastating car wreck, then had to swear up and down he wasn't hurt so the turn would succeed.

KURT BROWN: Dump Matsumoto is a nightmarish experience. Dick Murdoch comes off as an irritating brash, redneck asshole and Ted DiBiase presents himself as an arrogant human being who feels the universe centers around him.

SCOTT HUDSON: The fact that Flair gets more applause than boos only makes him that much better of a heel. He really had a better year as a heel than he did as a wrestler. The problem is Ric Flair, the heel's, middle name is poor taste. It's also one of the reasons I picked him first. If Austin Idol would have followed up his feud with Lawler with something even remotely interesting, he would have won.

STEVE SIMS: I have tremendous respect for Sherri Martel. I think she's the only sound American woman wrestler with the exception of Leilani Kai. She carried Buddy Rose & Doug Somers outside the ring and helped the AWA survive for as long as it did. I'm absolutely convinced she deserves this honor.

#### FEUD OF THE YEAR

1. JERRY LAWLER VS RICH & IDOL (177) . . . . .1,038
2. Steamboat vs. Savage (30) . . . . .426  
Inoki vs. Saito (46) . . . . .426
4. Andre vs. Hogan (17) . . . . .194
5. Savage vs. Honkeytonk (18) . . . . .186

Honorable Mention: Jumbo Tsuruta vs. Genichiro Tenryu 167, Negro Casas vs. El Hijo Del Santo 167, Ric Flair vs. Ron & Jimmy Garvin 123, New Leaders vs. Now Leaders 103, Ric Flair vs. Barry Windham 102, Terry Taylor vs. Chris Adams 77, Strike Force vs. Islanders 65, Four Horseman vs. Road Warriors & Super Powers 63

## PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Bruno Sammartino vs. Larry Zbyszko
- 1981 - Andre the Giant vs. Killer Khan
- 1982 - Ted DiBiase vs. Junkyard Dog
- 1983 - Freebirds vs. Von Erichs
- 1984 - Freebirds vs. Von Erichs
- 1985 - Ted DiBiase vs. Jim Duggan
- 1986 - Hulk Hogan vs. Paul Orndorff

First place was easy. Jerry Lawler's feud with Austin Idol and Tommy Rich was the best feud of the year. It had a violent aura. Both sides were as believable in their hatred toward one another. There were lots of surprises, such as Lawler getting his hair cut. The feud established Paul E. Dangerously as a manager, although in my mind he was overshadowed by Idol. And the feud remained fresh, was finished up and forgotten at the point where you almost wanted more--and can be brought back as any time. Most feuds drag on so long you almost wish you'll never see them again, while this one can be brought back and would prove successful again.

Another reason first place was easy was because there were no other great feuds. Andre and Hogan was a match, not a feud. The build-up was great, the match embarrassing and then it was over, and revived a few months later for one more match.

Ric Flair against the Garvins was good in some ways. The skits were fun. The angle with Precious infuriated a lot of people, but showed Flair at his best, even if that win a date with my wife bit was preposterous. But the feud hurt Flair badly in the long run, and the title change was an act of utter stupidity. And Jim Garvin just wasn't the right opponent for Flair for one shot, let alone continuing to bring the match back.

Flair and Barry Windham had great matches, but I don't recall anything else special about it. Jumbo Tsuruta vs. Genichiro Tenryu was fresh and had great heat, but didn't stand out in my mind.

Randy Savage vs. Ricky Steamboat did. Some of the matches were great. Some pretty poor. The initial angle, actually shot in 1986, went over well. Really, with the exception of Hogan's gigs, this thing went over to the public as well as anything Titan did all year and the Wrestlemania match was a great climax. Too bad they couldn't have just dropped it then. It gets my third place vote.

Second place goes to Antonio Inoki vs. Masa Saito. With the exception of Andre vs. Hogan, the gates were the best of any of the feuds. I expected the matches to be awful, but thanks to the marvelous work of

Saito, they were all passable and one was even exceptional. The heat was there, the action was there, the angle with the fight in the jungle was a unique twist, and the split up during the New Leaders vs. Now Leaders match was done cleverly.

KLON BRODY: The Garvin trio against Ric Flair was kind of weird. A date with my wife. Can I watch? The mannequin sequence. Ron Garvin as a drag queen becomes the NWA World champion. Too bad it wasn't done in Memphis. At least there it would have been funny. All it did was make Flair look worse than ever.

JEFF BOWDREN: Even though New Leaders vs. Now Leaders didn't have a real satisfactory conclusion, the matches were awesome and the crowd was really into them. What I originally thought would be a terrible feud turned out to be my favorite.

STEVE GERBER: Santo and Casas are the best I've ever seen.

SCOTT HUDSON: Lawler vs. Idol & Rich was the best feud of the past five years. Nothing came close. Inoki vs. Saito was interesting and the Ganryujima angle may be the biggest reason I'm picking it for second.

SMM: In the ring, Jerry Lawler vs. Austin Idol & Tommy Rich was good, but the angles and interviews were what really made this feud. Also, the fact that they had to keep it fresh every week was impressive.

JOE LANCELLO: The Lawler vs. Rich & Idol feud had more heat in one cage match than the AWA had in the entire year of 1987.

GARY ZIMAK: I really enjoyed the Savage vs. Steamboat feud this year. They worked some of the best matches put on by the WWF. The bottom line is if you take two great workers, you're going to get the fans interested. Even though I don't like Antonio Inoki, I have to rank his feud with Masa Saito No. 2. The fans really did get into it and some of the matches weren't half-bad. Saito is a very good performer, even having to carry Inoki, which is basically all he did.

## TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR

1. LANE & EATON (167) . . . . .1,032
2. Maeda & Takada (45) . . . . .505
3. Road Warriors (38) . . . . .390
4. Condrey & Eaton (40) . . . . .324
5. Tenryu & Hara (42) . . . . .286

Honorable Mention: Jumping Bomb Angels 203, Pat Tanaka & Paul Diamond 183, Strike Force 179, Rock & Roll Express 145, Hart Foundation 120, Islanders 89



### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Terry Gordy & Buddy Roberts  
1981 - Terry Gordy & Jimmy Snuka  
1982 - Stan Hansen & Ole Anderson  
1983 - Ricky Steamboat & Jay Youngblood  
1984 - Road Warriors  
1985 - Dynamite Kid & Davey Boy Smith  
1986 - Bobby Eaton & Dennis Condrey

My three picks here were easy, although deciding the order wasn't. Both versions of Jim Cornette's Midnight Express has innovative teamwork and great execution. Both Dennis Condrey and later Stan Lane complimented Bobby Eaton's high-flying style. Condrey and Eaton had locked up a slot by being rated No. 1 for most of their tenure together, and Eaton and Lane took over and may have been an even better team. The Stan Lane version gets second and the Condrey version gets third. I hate to leave out the JB Angels because anyone who actually makes me want to see a WWF card deserves some sort of an award. The fact the two actually improved in the WWF and worked more confidently in Japan because of their U.S. experience is also a first.

However, every time I saw Akira Maeda and Nobuhiko Takada team up, it was a four star match. A few times they were even five star matches. Four of the 10 best matches I saw all year involved the two as partners. That simply couldn't be overlooked, even though Condrey and Lane have them beat as far as synchronized moves go. The talent of the Japanese pair can't be beat.

JEFF BOWDREN: Eaton & Lane are an improvement over last year's winners, Eaton & Condrey. They've turned tag team wrestling into an art-form. Maeda & Takada are the only team in their class, while the Jumping Bomb Angels have renewed interest in women's wrestling in the United States.

STEVE GERBER: I still love the concept of the Road Warriors, regardless of their limitations in the performance department. Plus, they turned out to be decent human beings when I had the chance to meet them.

GARY ZIMAK: Even though they don't use any teamwork maneuvers, Takada & Maeda are definitely the most exciting tag team I've seen this year. The Midnight Express does more tag team maneuvers but they don't excite me as much as Maeda & Takada.

SCOTT HUDSON: No other team comes close to Eaton & Lane. Eaton was phenomenal and Lane turned out to be tons better than Condrey.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: Akira Maeda & Nobuhiko Takada looked unbeatable together. They are the type of team that when somebody who puts down

wrestling is shown a tape of, they will quickly shut up.

RYAN CLARK: Bobby Eaton and Whistler's Mother could win tag team of the year.

JON GALLAGHER: I still think the way Tanaka & Diamond worked together, especially with the slingshot DDT, earns my top vote.

### MOST IMPROVED

1. BIG BUBBA ROGERS (91) . . . .619
2. Sting (35) . . . . .319
3. Curt Hennig (30) . . . . .236
4. Lex Luger (17) . . . . .229
5. Masaharu Funaki (31) . . . .196

Honorable Mention: Owen Hart 180, Keeichi Yamada 154, Pat Tanaka 138, Stan Lane 108, Brian Pillman 105, Jeff Jarrett 69, Kendall Windham 68, Eddie Gilbert 63

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Larry Zbyszko  
1981 - Adrian Adonis  
1982 - Jim Duggan  
1983 - Curt Hennig  
1984 - The Cobra  
1985 - Steve Williams  
1986 - Rick Steiner

You know what's amazing about the list of previous winners? With the exception of Hennig and Zbyszko, every one of them received considerable votes this year in the most unimproved category. There are a lot of wrestlers who improved in the last year. Now the trick is finding who improved the most.

Curt Hennig gained a lot more respect from being the champion of the AWA, and being a very good heel champ at that. He had to carry generally weak opponents, and in my mind has turned into one of the premier all-around performers in the game. But, I had him in my top 10 in January, so he was a great wrestler who has gotten even better.

Eddie Gilbert has also gained lots of fans respect. But he's always been a good worker, just as booker put himself in the position where he was showcased. He deserves credit for improving his standing and improving the fans' perception of him, but most of that improvement has vanished since the spotlight was taken off him.

Sting, on the other hand, has improved tremendously. He hasn't improved at the rate he did in 1986, but that would have been impossible. But he's a good candidate.

So is Bubba Rogers. I didn't even consider him a wrestler in 1986, and now he's as good as anyone 350 pounds or more in the game. You have to admire his willingness to take a bump, and his tremendous improvements

over the past year. I'm going with him for second place.

Keiichi Yamada has made great strides as well. He was good when he came to Calgary, in fact he was good three years ago when he was a rookie in Japan, but he's one of the best around today. He's more confident and more ringwise.

The JB Angels have improved from being a good tag team, to becoming a polished and great team. Stan Lane, with a new lease on his career, isn't the same person who worked the past few years clowning around rings with Steve Keirn. I had always thought Paul Roma was terrible, just a little muscle guy who missed more moves than Adrian has stretch marks. But he has impressed with his desire and work rate and has some good moves. Now he's still got a long way to go, but the improvement is noticeable. Toshiaki Kawada and Chris Champion are similar in that they've got some dynamite moves, but don't have ring savvy and miss dangerous moves. Both were more impressive this year than last. Lex Luger has gone from being totally awful to being downright passable. If he would have spent more time in aerobics class, and less time on cosmetic forms of conditioning, he'd have gotten the nod.

I'm sure Barry Orton, if given the chance, would have been a good worker for several years. But he shocked the you-know-what out of me with his Zodiac gig. His ring work was darn good and his interviews were fantastic. He gets my pick for third.

Owen Hart improved of course, but he was great to begin with. Brian Pillman made a lot of progress, but as a rookie, he should have.

My pick for first place is actually someone I never saw before this year, but enough people whose opinions I trust concurred on this one. It's Japanese wrestler Masaharu Funaki. I saw him this year and he's destined to be one of the greats. I was told that without a doubt he's the most improved guy in the sport, so I'll go along with it.

JOHN MCADAM: A lot of people may not like Paul "Barbie Doll" Roma, but he has gone from being horrible to being a fairly good worker.

GARY ZIMAK: Ever since he joined the Midnight Express, Stan Lane is wrestling like a different person. Compared to when he was with Steve Keirn, especially at the end, it's like night and day. I've always enjoyed watching Bubba Rogers take crazy bumps. He's really turning into a good worker.

JEFF BOWDREN: Big Bubba Rogers went from a guy who wrestled in a suit to being a decent brawler. He moves

great for a guy his size. Funaki appears set for a big push. It would be nice to have seen him live, but he's got this thing about cab drivers. Luger has gone from being absolutely awful to where he is now average. His stamina is still horrendous, though.

SCOTT HUDSON: Luger was pitiful when the year began but now can have good matches. Hanging around the Horseman really did improve him. I hope teaming with Windham will keep him improving. Owen Hart is tons better than Luger, but he was also good when the year started. But whatever was wrong with Hart last year has vanished.

ED VARNER: Although Lex Luger isn't great, he has improved tremendously, especially on interviews. He also seems to be trying hard which is something that can't be said for Nikita.

BOB CLOSSON: I thought Pat Tanaka showed promise while with Crockett and his tour with the CWA has more than proven that.

#### MOST UNIMPROVED

1. BUTCH REED (47) . . . . .381
2. Yoshiaki Yatsu (45) . . . . .339
3. Jim Duggan (36) . . . . .242
4. Steve Williams (15) . . . . .158
5. George Takano (18) . . . . .135

Honorable Mention: Nikita Koloff 131, Adrian Adonis 125, Dynamite Kid 98, Hiroshi Wajima 90, Terry Gordy 88, Buddy Landel 77, Paul Orndorff 72, Greg Valentine 66, Bob Orton 63

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1984 - Jimmy Snuka  
1985 - Sgt. Slaughter  
1986 - Bob Orton

I'm looking here at guys whose performance went way down in the past year. My first choice is easy--Jim Duggan. Now his decline really started in 1986, but when he went to Titan, it was all over. He never had much skill, but now he can't even brawl convincingly and even a pro like Harley Race is having a tough time carrying him.

Second place goes to Yoshiaki Yatsu. This guy was No. 4 in last year's ratings, and I personally felt he was the best wrestler in Japan. While he shows flashes of spark now, once Riki Choshu left, he ceased to be the same wrestler.

In my mind, Butch Reed's biggest decline was in 1986 although he undeniably has gotten worse this year. I'm not going to pick on Dynamite Kid, who came back too soon from an injury and isn't the same wrestler he once was, or Terry Gordy, who needs knee surgery. Adrian Adonis has been declining for years.



Nikita Koloff has gotten worse, but he was bad to begin with.

Third place was for me between Jake Roberts, Steve Williams and Buddy Landel. Jake looked like he had everything going his way in the WWF when the year began. He should have gotten over great in his babyface turn. The injury when Honkeytonk Man smashed the guitar over him ended up requiring surgery, and other problems kept him away from the game another three months. Now he's just another face in the crowd. Based on the U.S. alone, I'd pick Williams. He was great early in the year feuding with Terry Gordy, but his work declined as rapidly as the UWF-under-Dusty. When I've seen him live of late, he didn't seem to care and had bad matches. However, he was still impressive in Japan, so I didn't go with him. Landel is still a great worker when he shows up for his matches, but you know the story there. He's gotten really out of shape as well. But since Landel still does look good while Jake doesn't, the Snake comes home with the bronze.

Mr. MIKE: Yoshiaki Yatsu gets first. It's not that he's washed up or anything, and he's still a top 50 wrestler, but it's the biggest drop of any top flight wrestler in the past year. Butch Reed now is just another guy named Bruce. Jim Duggan looked bad before he blew out his hamstring.

JEFF BOWDREN: Bill Apter's favorite Russian superhero has turned into the complete shits and he doesn't even have a good physique anymore.

GARY ZIMAK: I think it's almost painful to watch Yatsu wrestle. He really let himself get out of shape which has had a very negative affect on his performance. Last year he was one of the top three technical wrestlers in the world. I just hope he recovers and gets his act together.

JOE LANCELLO: Jim Duggan has gone from being a fairly good wrestler to a fairly bad imitator of Ed McMahon.

SMM: Stinkita Koloff continued all year to show nothing, as did his "super partner," but he's been bad for years although I think he got worse this year, especially on interviews. Kevin Von Erich keeps going down as well, but he's brain dead. My top choice is Kevin Sullivan. He does nothing except stomp and chop. My second choice is Hercules Hernandez, who I like by the way. He had the potential to be a great performer but he's gone down the tubes.

SCOTT HUDSON: While the Road Warriors can still work and they are my favorite tag team, they've lost it in the ring. This business of not selling makes them uninteresting to

watch. Nikita Koloff went from bad to worse in the last year.

#### MOST OBNOXIOUS

1. DAVID CROCKETT (95) . . . . .705
2. Dusty Rhodes (89) . . . . .570
3. Vince McMahon (20) . . . . .276
4. Gorilla Monsoon (9) . . . . .188
5. Ricky Morton (14) . . . . .149

Honorable Mention: Fritz Von Erich 135, Hulk Hogan 128, Larry Nelson 111, Riki Choshu 90, Gene Okerlund 71

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - "Judo" Gene LeBelle
- 1982 - David Crockett
- 1983 - Vince McMahon
- 1984 - Vince McMahon
- 1985 - Vince McMahon
- 1986 - Vince McMahon

My first pick is easy. Fritz Von Erich stands for everything I detest. I can't make it any more simple than that. I often disagree with things in this business, but that's business and everyone has a different idea of how it should be run. The stunts Fritz has pulled makes him beneath contempt. I truly do feel sorry for him because of the tragedies he's had to endure, but the way he's tried to capitalize on them is a whole lot more despicable than any promotional blunders he or anyone else may have done.

Nobody else really gets under my skin. David Crockett is incompetent and an embarrassment to the company, but his incompetence makes a great source for conversation. I like Dusty's interviews, although his matches and booking I could do without. I do turn the TV off whenever Hulk Hogan shows up, but I can't say I dislike the guy, just avoid watching him.

Mr. MIKE: The richest category of them all. There are lots of folks to strongly consider, like Rod Trongard, Gorilla Monsoon, Gene Okerlund and Vince McMahon, but still, top pick goes to Al DeRusha. I suspect he's truly in love with the sound of his voice. I sure can't figure out why. It's just that he oozes sincerity when he announces anything in the neo-breathless with anticipation bleat. Any guy who can nauseate me merely with his ring introductions has got to get some sort of recognition. Second goes to Dusty Rhodes. What's tougher? Looking at him, watching him wrestle or listening to him pontificate? David Crockett slipped to third only because I avoided anything with him all year. Can't he find something else besides announcing to do, since he's "Vice President of Internal Operations, Land Development, Producer of programs for television and President of NEMO." You'd think we'd catch a break, like having Jim permanently reassign him to a six

foot deep plot of the land development division.

JOHN MCADAM: Doesn't Gorilla the Baboon realize that referring to Bobby Heenan five times a week as a "piece of garbage" wears thin after a while."

JEFF BOWDREN: The big fat blond guy.

KIM WOOD: Dusty Rhodes is still great on interviews and is a great entertainer in the ring, but to continue to push himself at the expense of developing needed talent is truly obnoxious.

TERESA DEMARIE: The WWF is my favorite promotion, but is also yields the largest number of obnoxious personalities. I can't stand Monsoon, you have no idea how much.

BOB CLOSSON: I don't hate Dusty Rhodes, but I can't stand what he did to his promotion.

BOB SHATTUCK: What bothers me about Monsoon is when he makes up fake names for body parts. But the winner is David Crockett.

RYAN CLARK: You can spend all day explaining why David Crockett will be the clear-cut winner, but why waste space on the guy?

ED VARNER: I pick David Crockett because he is totally unwatchable and gets worse by the week. Greg Gagne is the most obnoxious babyface. He comes across as a daddy's boy. McMahon is more tolerable but I can't stand his portrayal of the "uninformed announcer."

JON KARESH: It never ceases to amaze me how obnoxious Morton is. His popularity is plunging faster than the stock market, so his remedy is to be even more of what it was that turned so many of the fans off in the first place.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Ricky Morton beats out Hulk Hogan for my first place vote. At least Hogan carries the promotion. Icky Ricky has no real reason to be the way he is. From a fan viewpoint, Dusty Rhodes' overindulgent self-hype has gotten way out of hand.

#### BEST ON INTERVIEWS

1. JIM CORNETTE (179) . . . . . 1,170
2. Ric Flair (44) . . . . . 665
3. Paul E. Dangerously (17) . . . 239
4. Jerry Lawler (12) . . . . . 204
5. Austin Idol (14) . . . . . 137

Honorable Mention: Ted DiBiase 93, Randy Savage 83, Terry Taylor 66

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Lou Albano and Roddy Piper (tied)  
1982 - Roddy Piper  
1983 - Roddy Piper  
1984 - Jimmy Hart  
1985 - Jim Cornette  
1986 - Jim Cornette

There are a lot of good interviews around, but for consistent great interviews than I watch over-and-over again, Jim Cornette is first and Ric Flair second. Nobody else comes close. I'm going with Austin Idol third because of his work in Memphis, although I hate to leave off Jerry Lawler, who has the babyface interview down to an art form and shows great versatility in character; or Ted DiBiase, who does a great gimmick; or Road Warrior Hawk, who just kills me; or Makhan Singh, who is downright hilarious at times....actually I could go on and on here.

JEFF BOWDREN: Jim Cornette is the king of today's interviews and a hero to all smart fans for his inside jokes. Flair is as smooth as ever and always worth listening to, but needs a fresh angle badly. Please Ric, spare us the details on your sex life. Sullivan is very funny, but his biggest problem is he laughs at his own jokes.

TERESA DEMARIE: By virtue of the last Piper's Pit, I'm giving Roddy first place. The last Pit was nothing short of brilliant.

RYAN CLARK: Upon review of my 1987 save tapes, I found that listening to Cornette a second time, the impact wasn't as great as the first time. That wasn't the case with Flair. I could watch his Precious/Space Mountainette interview over and over and laugh every time.

KEVIN HANCER: I picked Jim Cornette first and Paul E. Dangerously second. Third goes to Curt Hennig, whose "hate Greg Gagne" rhetoric has been delightful and has tapped into a hitherto untapped resource, the AWA fans latent hatred of Reggie.

PAUL HANLIN: If I see Ric Flair take his jacket off, then his shirt one more time and act like a raving maniac...Cornette had a fabulous run in the summer but was silenced lately, but he still gets my pick. Lawler doesn't come across as insulting the fans' intelligence and wrestling should have more people like him. Road Warrior Hawk gets third. He's big, tough and funny at the same time.

PAT CROCKER: Cornette's interview where he dressed like Jimmy Garvin and had the poster of the near-naked obese lady was a classic.

JOE LILLY: During his heel stint in Memphis, Idol constantly came up with



fantastic interviews. They were some of the greatest I'd ever heard.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: The one thing I've noticed about both Cornette and Makhan Singh is they're informed about what's going on in the real world and can mix it into their interviews. Every major figure who has fallen from grace is fair game to Cornette. Makhan never lets anything negative about Calgary pass without mention.

SMM: I guess Jim Cornette will win this, but for part of the year he didn't impress me, but the last month or so he has been great. Dick Murdoch gave some great crazed redneck interviews. Terry Funk was unbelievable in Florida telling the truth about Dusty Rhodes. Jerry Lawler is always great. Buddy Landel was funny in Continental. Bill Dundee has some good interviews. I also like Gary Hart because he speaks intelligently. But my top choice goes to Terry Taylor's heel interviews.

SCOTT HUDSON: Jim Cornette said the following thing to Jim Ross at the UWF taping I attended: "Ross, I hope I run into you at the mall one day. I hope I'm driving and I hope you're walking." I laughed for 30 minutes.

JEFF ARCHEY: When Jim Cornette came out with the wig and boa and acted like Jimmy Garvin it was totally hilarious.

GARY ZIMAK: The only problem with Paul Dangerously's impersonation of Tommy Rich is that you can understand what he's saying.

STEVE SIMS: Jerry Lawler acts like that rare avis, a normal human being. Cornette isn't normal, but his shtick is terrific. However, I won't watch him more than once a week because this sort of non-stop talking can get old. Sean Royal's surprise imitation of Road Warrior Hawk was the year's best interview. It came completely out of left field and had me rolling on the floor.

JOE LANCELLO: If it wasn't for Jim Cornette, I would have never known that Hostess Twinkies are a performance enhancing food, that the Midnight Express are Oliver North's favorite tag team, Kendall Windham is the only athlete in America who can tread water in a garden hose and that Dusty Rhodes is the heartburn of America.

DAVID LEVIN: Jim Cornette won it for the line "Jimmy Valiant doesn't deserve to have hair."

#### MOST CHARISMATIC

1. HULK HOGAN (261) . . . . . 1,403
2. Road Warriors (6) . . . . . 432
3. Riki Choshu (25) . . . . . 418
4. Chigusa Nagayo (22) . . . . . 371
5. Ric Flair (14) . . . . . 279

Honorable Mention: Dusty Rhodes 134,  
Randy Savage 132

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Ric Flair
- 1981 - Michael Hayes
- 1982 - Dusty Rhodes and Ric Flair  
(tied)
- 1983 - Ric Flair
- 1984 - Ric Flair
- 1985 - Hulk Hogan
- 1986 - Hulk Hogan

I guess Hulk Hogan has to get the nod and Chigusa Nagayo has to be in second place. Third is harder as Ric Flair, Riki Choshu and the Road Warriors all declined as far as their hold on the audience. Dusty Rhodes has charisma to be sure, but plenty of guys have more. Antonio Inoki is the same as Rhodes, he's over because he keeps himself over to the point that it's ridiculous. I guess it at least works for Inoki. I can almost see going with Roddy Piper if he was still around, because people reacted to everything he did. Randy Savage is up there, but he's not extraordinary in that regard. After seeing the heat Choshu got when he slapped Fujinami in the face in April, he gets the nod over the Warriors for third spot.

TERESA DEMARIE: I don't know if I go for "getting a big reaction without doing much," as a proper definition of charisma. There are two basic types of charisma, physical charisma and personal charisma. Physical charisma is great size, strength and a commanding appearance. At this point in wrestling, this seems more important than personal charisma. However, just because you have a physique doesn't mean you'll get over. You need to know how to use it and have it packaged properly. Personal charisma is the kind of a person you'd invite to a party to liven things up. Some blend both types and technically this should be the kind of charisma a wrestler should have. Hogan is the best example of physical charisma. Others who have it to some degree are Nikita, the Road Warriors, Luger and Orndorff. I've never seen anyone in the business with more personal charisma than Piper, except for Jim Cornette and he's not a wrestler so he doesn't count. Maybe Lawler comes close. Lots of guys have a little of both but don't exploit it well. Flair and Choshu have both and blend it to good advantage. Savage and Ventura do as well.

SMM: Who gets the most reaction doing the least both inside and outside the ring? Hulk Hogan. The Road Warriors belong here in second place. Ric Flair is third. He's got a lot of charisma. He's so good, and subconsciously, everybody realizes it.

### BEST TECHNICAL WRESTLER

1. NOBUHIKO TAKADA (50) . . . . . 468
2. Owen Hart (48) . . . . . 438
3. Akira Maeda (28) . . . . . 355
4. Tatsumi Fujinami (33) . . . . . 316
5. Yoshiaki Fujiwara (46) . . . . . 285

Honorable Mention: Ted DiBiase 261, Ric Flair 200, Masa Saito 177, Curt Hennig 156, Hiroshi Hase 144, Barry Windham 131, Bret Hart 71, Brad Armstrong 65, Kazuo Yamazaki 63, Rick Martel 60

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Bob Backlund  
1981 - Ted DiBiase  
1982 - Satoru Sayama  
1983 - Satoru Sayama  
1984 - Dynamite Kid and Masa Saito (tied)  
1985 - Tatsumi Fujinami  
1986 - Tatsumi Fujinami

What is a technical wrestler? After all, a guy like Ted DiBiase or Bret Hart can do everything asked of them by WWF fans. But to me, the best technical is the guy with a wide variety of moves, some not in the standard repertoire and great execution. DiBiase's execution is great, but his moves and bumps, while flawless, are also all standard. Hart does wilder bumps, but his moves, while executed well, can't match up to his younger brother. Tatsumi Fujinami is pretty well in that same boat, except his actual wrestling is better, but then again, he's required to be.

Yoshiaki Fujiwara is a master at mat wrestling. I always thought someone who mainly worked on the mat was boring, but not anymore. This guy is amazing to watch and gets my first place vote.

Akira Maeda is second. He has the widest variety of moves, and they are done in an unexpected sequence oftentimes. He's innovative and legit looking while in the ring.

A lot of good candidates for third. DiBiase, Owen and Bret Hart, Nobuhiko Takada, Hiro Hase, Fujinami and Masa Saito come to mind. Owen Hart is the most innovative. Hase is almost pretty to watch. Takada and Saito are more awesome. Fujinami and DiBiase are more flawless. But Owen Hart gets the third nod.

### BEST BRAWLER

1. BRUISER BRODY (94) . . . . . 609
2. Terry Gordy (29) . . . . . 279
3. Steve Williams (29) . . . . . 278
4. Eddie Gilbert (33) . . . . . 275
5. Ted DiBiase (18) . . . . . 226

Honorable Mention: Dump Matsumoto 165, Dick Murdoch 153, Jerry Lawler 151, Stan Hansen 135, Jim Duggan 129, Akira Maeda 90, Ron Garvin 63

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Bruiser Brody  
1981 - Bruiser Brody  
1982 - Bruiser Brody  
1983 - Bruiser Brody  
1984 - Bruiser Brody  
1985 - Stan Hansen  
1986 - Terry Gordy

As many people pointed out, this was a lousy year for this category. Terry Gordy had it locked up before his knee locked up. Jim Duggan got a lot of votes, but in my mind he's closer to the worst brawler than the best. Dick Murdoch is great in Japan, but what about the other nine months? Ron Garvin is believable dishing it out, but doesn't sell worth a damn. Now his matches with Flair were great brawls and frighteningly realistic, but that's why I'm picking Flair first. The Road Warriors matches don't have enough give-and-take either.

Bruiser Brody gets second, and probably would have gotten first if he'd been to Japan more often. The guy is just as good as he always was, just in the U.S. relies on the wild-man gimmick and running around the building. In Japan he has to show toughness, and he does better than anyone.

Third goes to Eddie Gilbert. I saw him in more great brawls this year than anyone else. The Battle of New Orleans was a classic. Some of the bunkhouse matches with he and Dick Murdoch against Steve Williams and Terry Gordy were tremendous as well, and Gilbert carried them more than anyone else.

JEFF BOWDREN: Dump Matsumoto has to be viewed live to be truly appreciated. The way she beats up the TV cameramen, TV announcers, photographers and then brings in oil cans, kendo sticks, nunchakus, and chains without getting caught, or better yet sued, is brawling at its best.

Mr. MIKE: Welcome back to the top, BB. Just because Brody has got it down to such an art form he can do it by remote control is no reason to hold it against him.

RYAN CLARK: Eddie Gilbert had more great brawls than anyone else this past year. Running a close second was Ron Garvin. Why he's a face, I'll never know. The way he sadistically beats up jobbers and turned Flair's chest into raw meat qualifies him as a front-runner.

BOB MARTIN: The Battle of New Orleans was the brawl of the year

TERESA DEMARIE: Since I'm a boxing fan, I'm picky about the way guys brawl in the ring. I'm not impressed by size because anyone who watches boxing knows that big guys aren't worth diddly in the ring. However, I



have to look at this from a marks' point of view as well, and big guys do look more ferocious. I look for realism in throwing as much as in selling. Bruiser Brody is great but I haven't seen a lot of him this year. I don't think Jim Duggan is very good. Piper throws excellent punches and is the most like a boxer, but his size hurts him as does the fact his matches are short and he doesn't sell much. DiBiase is very good, but hasn't shown anything since being in the WWF in this regard. Gilbert has been on top of his form all year. Gordy was good before he messed up his knee. I don't personally care for Williams, but he is a top brawler and gets my first place vote.

#### BEST FLYING WRESTLER

1. OWEN HART (144) . . . . . 990
2. Bobby Eaton (95) . . . . . 800
3. Tiger Mask (25) . . . . . 444
4. Keiji Muto (45) . . . . . 361
5. Keiichi Yamada (5) . . . . . 238

Honorable Mention: Randy Savage 205, Silver King 153, Islander Tama 87, Super Astro 80, Negro Casas 76, Chris Champion 63

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1981 - Jimmy Snuka  
 1982 - Satoru Sayama  
 1983 - Satoru Sayama  
 1984 - Dynamite Kid  
 1985 - Tiger Mask  
 1986 - Tiger Mask

Owen Hart gets first easily. He's got the widest array of flying moves, to the point of insanity. Also, he does them in believable fashion, whereas too many of the Mexican wrestlers' sequences look choreographed. Still, I'm going with a Mexican wrestler second, and it was between Atlantis, who I've seen a few times and is very impressive, and Silver King, who I haven't seen but have heard about. I'm going with Atlantis here. I hate to ignore Bobby Eaton, but Keiichi Yamada's shooting star press clinched him third place.

JEFF BOWDREN: Owen Hart's matches in Japan sealed the award for him. His move where he is caught in an armbar, then runs to the ropes, drops down on his backside, does a flip, lands on his feet and hip tosses his opponent is amazing. Tiger Mask gets second for a number of reasons. I think he has the best dropkick in the business. The move where he jumped from the top ropes onto Tenryu, who was on the floor, and then got tossed into the crowd was as good as anything I saw. Yamada's shooting star press is good enough in itself to get him third place.

RYAN CLARK: I break flying down in two categories, the actual flying and the end result. Where flying is concerned, Owen Hart is without peer.

However what I consider more important is the end result. In this way, Eaton is better. When Eaton executes his leg drop from the top rope, his heavy thud landing looks devastating. Hart looks more like a gymnast when he's flying. He's smooth and appears effortless. Eaton looks more like a wrestler who is trying to afflict damage to his opponent.

SMM: Really, how much flying does Bobby Eaton really do? The Mexicans rule here. I've seen Lizmark dive off the top ropes onto a guy on the floor, and when he jumps, he jumps up high and does a swan dive in mid-air. Atlantis also looks real good. I've got Eaton third.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: I picked Owen Hart first. The one thing about the Mexican wrestling is it looks to choreographed while people like Hart, Eaton and Yamada make it look natural.

STEVE GERBER: Negro Casas, El Hijo Del Santo and Super Astro take insane chances with their bodies every match, but Casas is a notch above everyone. He's a true kamikaze.

GARY ZIMAK: Owen Hart does some of the craziest flying moves, especially hit out of the ring body presses. It wasn't difficult to pick him first. Keiji Muto and Tiger Mask also do spectacular flying moves. I want to give an honorable mention to Mexican wrestlers Atlantis and Super Astro, both of whom do some incredible flying moves in their matches. However, many of their moves primarily display great balance and agility but aren't as risky as the moves Hart does.

#### MOST OVERRATED

1. DUSTY RHODES (102) . . . . . 798
2. Hulk Hogan (116) . . . . . 767
3. Nikita Koloff (26) . . . . . 329
4. Lex Luger (14) . . . . . 210
5. Hiroshi Wajima (36) . . . . . 180

Honorable Mention: Kevin Von Erich 110, Antonio Inoki 75, Steve Williams 69, Honkeytonk Man 64, Andre the Giant 60

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Mr. Wrestling II  
 1981 - Pedro Morales  
 1982 - Pedro Morales  
 1983 - Bob Backlund  
 1984 - Big John Studd  
 1985 - Hulk Hogan  
 1986 - Hulk Hogan

Here we go again with the debate, overrated by who. I won't pick Hulk Hogan, although he is sadly lacking in comparison to his hype. But big hype is part of the business and if it works, well the more hype the better. In the case of Dusty Rhodes, my first pick, the more hype the better doesn't work. Booker Virgil

has overpushed himself to the point where even a blind man can see it is ludicrous. Second place goes to Kevin Von Erich. He can't wrestle. He can't draw. He just picked the right father. Third goes to Ron Garvin. I hate to pick Garvin because he had some good matches this year and there are plenty of worse guys around like Inoki, Wajima, Lex Luger, Nikita Koloff and half of the WWF. But by making him World Champion, it was overpromotion that clinches a third place spot. Garvin has no charisma, doesn't sell much, is slow, doesn't take many bumps, isn't much on interviews. His selling point is he's brutal in the ring, but that's not enough to be a World champion, even an interim champ.

Mr. MIKE: Still the champion.....Hulk Hogan. The darker the tan, the worse he is a wrestler. Of course he does perform well, it's just galling that to the unknowing he's the standard by which you can totally ignore wrestling otherwise. Lex Luger gets No. 2 only because they haven't made him World champion yet. He's the most sickening case of a promotion trying to extoll wrestling ability (although it became laughable when they started to rave over his match against Dusty). Now that he's a babyface, we're going to be drowned in the loads of lard we'll be hearing. Kevin Von Erich gets third only if there's anyone left who believes he's even a phantom of his once good self.

JOHN MCADAM: If I had a dollar for every casual fan that told me they thought Nikita Koloff was a great wrestler, I'd have enough money for a two-year subscription to Pro Wrestling Illustrated, which probably put the dumb idea in their heads in the first place."

SCOTT HUDSON: First, an overweight ex-dimestore cowboy shortstop who as of late doesn't know a wrestling angle from a triangle; second, a Japanese corpse whose body resembles a crocker sack full of rotten tomatoes; and third Oral Roberts illegitimate grandson and the first man to suffer from cauliflower feet.

GARY ZIMAK: Hogan, Rhodes and Nikita are three total zeroes in the ring whose fan reaction is inversely proportional to their wrestling skills. The thing that annoys me the most about Rhodes is that he makes the other wrestlers spend their interview time pushing him. At one time I enjoyed listening to Rhodes on interviews, but all that b.s. about him being a legend makes me want to vomit.

STEVE GERBER: Anyone who needs to have his ego strokes as much as Dusty Rhodes does, has to be terminally insecure. However, when it comes at the expense of others' careers and

possibly destroying a very promising promotion, it becomes criminal.

STEVE STOGDALE: Lex Luger has improved a lot but he's not nearly to the point they'd like you to think he is.

SMM: Hulk Hogan could absolutely never live up to his hype. Lex Luger is pushed heavily in the mags but has no talent. While the Road Warriors, while not bad in the ring, can't live up to their reputation.

SEAN HENDRICK: The top two go to Rhodes and Hogan. What's bad is both seem to actually believe their hype. It's no big deal that the casual fans buy it. The term legends in their own mind applies to both of them.

#### MOST UNDERRATED

1. BRAD ARMSTRONG (42) . . . . .294
2. Pat Tanaka (32) . . . . .237
3. Bret Hart (24). . . . .224
4. Bobby Eaton (25). . . . .214
5. Kazuo Yamazaki (36) . . . . .193

Honorable Mention: Curt Hennig 188, Owen Hart 123, Sam Houston 120, Masahuar Funaki 115, Terry Taylor 78, Eddie Gilbert 70, Keiichi Yamada 66, Billy Travis 64

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Iron Sheik  
 1981 - Buzz Sawyer  
 1982 - Adrian Adonis  
 1983 - Dynamite Kid  
 1984 - Brian Blair  
 1985 - Bobby Eaton  
 1986 - Bobby Eaton

I can't consider Bret Hart. Whenever I do the radio show here, invariably someone will call up to say how Hart is the best wrestler in the WWF. Many fans recognize Hart's talent, and he held the tag team title most of the year. Kazuo Yamazaki could be pushed harder, but most fans also recognize his talents. Harley Race's talents aren't appreciated by the fans. I don't think Nick Bockwinkel got his proper respect either. Konga the Barbarian deserves a push, but I'm not as high on his ability as a worker as some. He's good, but to me he's a real impressive looking guy who works okay. I almost want to pick Butch Moffatt as Jason the Terrible, but the guy is over tremendously within his territory, just others can't see him.

My first pick, Pat Tanaka, takes the best bumps in the business. He works great and put Jeff Jarrett over in a big way in Memphis. But I don't think anyone but the real hardcore fans even know about him, much less appreciate his talents. I'm going with Tiger Mask second. Now he's a big star, but somehow I feel he's also not appreciated although he does get a push. I think the unfair comparisons to Sayama have stalled his progress in some ways. Third is



Sam Houston. I know he's skinny, but he works hard every time I've seen him and takes some of the craziest bumps around. I know a lot of people who recognize his talents, but plenty of others just can't get past the physique.

Mr. MIKE: Pat Tanaka is only two feet too short or otherwise he'd be a big name. If they ever did a lighter weight circuit (gee, in our evolving world of "narrowcasting," maybe the time will come that someone finally does a lighter-guy emphasis-on-speed and moves promotion....Sure there's a chance--I almost lost it there, sorry). Bret Hart gets second not just for ability alone, Bret is a pretty complete package. Ninja Shunji Takano was the best kept secret in the United States.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: Brad Armstrong was the most outstanding wrestler in the Crockett Cup tournament.

SEAN HENDRICK: Harley Race takes some of the best bumps in the business and I always enjoy his matches.

GARY ZIMAK: It should be a criminal offense to do what JCP and Dusty have done to Brad Armstrong. Without a doubt he is one of the best workers on any circuit, but has never gotten the kind of push needed to have a chance at getting over. Tiger Mask is another wrestler who is seriously held back. When given the chance to show what he's got, he really shines. Basically he's been used of late as a glorified prelim wrestler.

KATHLEEN KARDASH: Velvet McIntyre is very good, works hard and doesn't bumble up. She's got a lot of talent and deserves to be recognized for it.

JOHNNY BLACK: Big Bubba Rogers--as Steve Williams has said on more than one occasion, he's "big, agile, quick and he can move."

STEVE STOGDALE: Ken Wayne takes some awesome bumps and keeps coming back for more, including some face first bumps on the concrete floor from over the top rope without breaking his fall.

JEFF ARCHEY: Easily Pat Tanaka. This guy works hard, takes tremendous bumps, even on concrete, sells his soul, however he's not appreciated by the fans and others. Billy Travis is much like Tanaka as he sells well and works hard. He doesn't have the speed Tanaka has, but he's underrated. Sam Houston is third. I saw the bump he took with Tiger Chung Lee in Nashville.

STEVE SIMS: I think Luger's better than he gets credit for just because he blows up early. He works longer than Hogan, Rhodes and a lot of other guys and his improvement this year has been remarkable.

TERESA DEMARIE: Bret Hart is excellent, consistently putting on a good show when it counts, taking tremendous falls and he's technically great, and he's even fairly colorful. Martel is so good he makes the rest of the WWF guys, even Steamboat and Savage, look bad in comparison. His main weakness is lack of a strong personality and his poor interviews.

RYAN CLARK: Brad Armstrong is probably the best wrestler in the world who isn't getting pushed.

#### BEST PROMOTION

1. NEW JAPAN PRO WRESTLING (149) 1,032
2. Titan Sports (107) . . . . .827
3. All Japan Women (48) . . . . .481
4. Jim Crockett Promotions (40) .457
5. Jarrett Promotions (32) . . .404

Honorable Mention: Stampede Wrestling 305, All Japan Pro Wrestling 275, Universal Wrestling Federation 104, UWA in Mexico 74

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1983 - Jim Crockett Promotions
- 1984 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
- 1985 - All Japan Pro Wrestling
- 1986 - Universal Wrestling Federation

The bottom line is making money and the WWF can't be equalled. They put on a slick TV show, have made good use of their network time, at least of late. Their big shows have been tremendously successful. I'm only going to pick them third, however. I've been to enough of their live shows this year to know you don't get the action than almost every other promotion provides.

My top pick is easy. It's the Japanese women's group. They put on the best cards and have the most crowd participation. As an all-around entertainment event, it can't be beat. The shows are the best organized, have the most upbeat atmosphere, and the wrestling can't be beat.

Second would be New Japan. In many ways they weren't successful in bringing their TV ratings up. However, this group has the most top-flight talents up and down the card of any group in the world. Everyone works every night. We saw five straight nights here and didn't catch anybody (except Inoki, who had Murdoch to carry him) dogging it. The prelim matches, in particular, are the best to be found anywhere.

I hate to leave out Stampede Wrestling. While their TV production leaves a lot to be desired, the work rate is the best in North America. Also of note here is that the wrestlers all seem to show improvement as the weeks go by.

The NWA, at least for the first few months of the year deserves credit and the CWA puts out a great dollar

value of entertainment but like Stampede, just aren't in the same league action-wise or business-wise with the Japan groups, let alone with Titan's hype machine.

Mr. MIKE: WWF is an extraordinary promotion and if they weren't so consciously not trying to sell "traditional wrestling," they'd be an easy No. 2. But New Japan gets first. They have too incredible an array of talent for even Inoki to screw it up. Japanese girls get second with WWF third.

BOB CLOSSON: Watching as much of the All Japan women shows as I have, I've got to feel the promotion is the best. The fans are so supportive and enthusiastic it puts other promotions to shame.

DAVID LEVIN: Despite all that has been done to destroy it, JCP is the best. I love the Roadies and Slick Ric too much to ever stop watching.

JEFF ARCHEY: I agree that No. 1 is New Japan. The talent roster is so enormous and the matches are top notch. Second place is CWA, again they take what talent they have and seem to bring in respectable crowds. The talent roster isn't that strong, but they take advantage of what is there to the fullest. Third is WWF. They are a strong promotion, but their talent isn't used to the fullest.

JEFF BOWDREN: The Japanese women are so organized that it's almost scary. Their souvenir stand is state-of-the-art and one that every U.S. promotion could learn from. The women know their audience and are successful reaching it. New Japan is the best promotion as far as ability in the ring from the top of the card to the bottom of the card. They spend time developing their young wrestlers. Titan is superior technically.

JOE LANCELLO: I agree with what was written last year, that the WWF is the best until you add in the word wrestling. The Japanese have more talent, better work and better matches. The CWA is the best U.S. promotion since Bill Watts sold out.

SCOTT HUDSON: New Japan gets first for all the obvious reasons. Titan gets second because of this--no good talent, no real heat, one or two halfway interesting angles, one great match and nothing else and they drew 93,000 fans in March. They were doing something right. Third goes to Jarrett Promotions, with no big names, but still great feuds, great matches and great television.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Even though I see major flaws with all the domestic promotions, I'll place a grudging first place vote for Jim Crockett Promotions. They promote cards with the highest percentage of matches that I want to see.

GARY ZIMAK: There's no doubt in my mind that New Japan is the hottest promotion in the world. The unfortunate thing about it is if all the original angles were allowed to proceed without being reversed, they would have been even better. Unfortunately, Inoki couldn't let someone else steal his spotlight. I selected the WWF, which I consider to be the best promotion in the U.S. third. I just wish these guys would perform on house shows as well as they do when national TV cameras are rolling. Titan definitely has some great wrestlers but many of them rank as among the laziest around when it comes to putting out at house shows. If I didn't know better, I would swear that Crockett has hired Mike LeBelle to run his promotion.

#### BEST TELEVISION SHOW

1. WMC-TV FROM MEMPHIS (119) . . .836
2. New Japan (87) . . . . .819
3. WWF Superstars (66) . . . . .618
4. All Japan (36) . . . . .305
5. All Japan Women (13) . . . . .256

Honorable Mention: Pro Wrestling this Week 190, UWF Wrestling 185, WTBS World Championship Wrestling 120, Stampede Wrestling 117, Power Pro Wrestling 95, NWA World Wide Wrestling 78, WWF Prime Time Wrestling 62

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1983 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
- 1984 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
- 1985 - Mid South (later UWF) Wrestling
- 1986 - UWF Wrestling

I'm going strictly by what entertains me here. I can't pick WWF Superstars of Wrestling for any higher than third, although I acknowledge it is a great show, because it does little to hold my interest. In fact even if I'm home when the show airs, rarely do I bother to watch.

New Japan is tops in my book. Great match after great match. I can't say more about it. Memphis is second because when they do a good angle they have no peer. They have no budget yet put on an entertaining show minus production values and slickness. If I had a fourth place vote, I'd go with the Japanese women. Again, great matches and I even enjoy the music. As a wrestling show, it blows away Titan and the production is first rate as well, but Titan has them beat as far as developing personalities.

JEFF ARCHEY: The Memphis show definitely. The shows' ratings prove it. It's not the same old squashes week after week. It's entertaining and unpredictable.

BOB CLOSSON: Watching all three Japanese shows makes me want to do an Iron Sheik spit on American



television. But I will always think the Memphis show is No. 1. Not all of their skits work, but when they do it's a work of art.

SCOTT HUDSON: Titan's Superstars of Wrestling show is superior in every aspect except workrate to every other show. I enjoy UWF second because Jim Ross is a fantastic announcer and Memphis third.

#### MATCH OF THE YEAR

1. SAVAGE VS. STEAMBOAT 3-29 Pontiac (112) . . . . . 849
2. Flair vs. Windham 1-20 Fayetteville (49) . . . . . 561
3. Chigusa vs. Asuka 2-26 Kawasaki (69) . . . . . 444
4. Takada vs. Koshinaka 2-5 Tokyo (51) . . . . . 327
5. Maeda & Takada vs. Muto & Koshinaka 3-20 Tokyo (27) . . 276

Honorable Mention: Ric Flair vs. Barry Windham 4-11 Baltimore 273, El Hijo Del Santo vs. Negro Casas 7-27 hair vs. hair match Los Angeles 177, Jerry Lawler vs. Austin Idol hair vs. hair match 4-27 Memphis 161, Jumbo Tsuruta vs. Genichiro Tenryu 10-6 Tokyo 135, War Games I 7-4 Atlanta 115, Choshu & Maeda & Takada & Fujinami & Strong Machine vs. Inoki & Saito & Sakaguchi & Fujiwara & Murdoch 9-17 Osaka 102, Maeda & Takada vs. Fujiwara & Yamazaki 9-1 Fukuoka 97, Inoki vs. Saito 4-27 Tokyo 90, Bockwinkel vs. Hennig 5-2 San Francisco 83.

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Bob Backlund vs. Ken Patera in Madison Square Garden
- 1981 - Pat Patterson vs. Sgt. Slaughter in Madison Square Garden
- 1982 - Tiger Mask vs. Dynamite Kid 8-25 Tokyo
- 1983 - Ric Flair vs. Harley Race 11-24 Greensboro
- 1984 - Freebirds vs. Von Erichs 7-4 Fort Worth
- 1985 - Tiger Mask vs. Kuniaki Kobayashi 6-12 Tokyo
- 1986 - Ric Flair vs. Barry Windham 2-14 Orlando

Two matches come to mind immediately here because they are two of the best matches I've ever seen. One is Ric Flair vs. Barry Windham on January 20 in Fayetteville, which received a ton of votes. The other is Lioness Asuka vs. Chigusa Nagayo on February 23 in Kawasaki. The girls match had a wider variety of moves, and no doubt had more heat. I probably would have enjoyed watching it live better. But the Flair match was unbelievable as well. It's a close call for No. 1 but I'm going with Flair vs. Windham, which was paced a bit better. The girls match had so many good moves and near falls that they began to

lose their effect. There were a lot of candidates for third, and almost every one had Nobuhiko Takada involved. I finally went for the September 1 tag match where Takada and Akira Maeda lost their IWGP tag belts to Yoshiaki Fujiwara and Kazuo Yamazaki. Everything was solid. It looked realistic and it was probably the most brutal match I saw all year as well.

JON KARESH: The Ric Flair vs. Barry Windham match from the Crockett Cup was probably the best match I've seen live since Ray Stevens vs. Pat Patterson at the Cow Palace 15 years ago.

SCOTT HUDSON: I may be the only one to vote for it, but the match of the year was on June 7 at the Omni between The Freebirds against Ric Flair, Lex Luger & Tully Blanchard. All action, no restholds, brawling, technical moves and heat like you wouldn't believe.

SMM: I haven't seen a lot of matches that contend for this one. But it's easy to pick the best one, Akira Maeda & Nobuhiko Takada vs. Shiro Koshinaka & Keiji Muto on March 20 in Tokyo where Muto & Koshinaka won the IWGP tag belts. It was fantastic all the way. My theory on why it was so good was because it was going to be an upset, with Maeda & Takada having to do the job. Because of that, they had to work extra hard to "save face." So they had to make themselves look stronger than Muto & Koshinaka. In turn, Muto & Koshinaka had to work extra hard just to keep up with them. Second goes to the Jerry Lawler vs. Austin Idol hair match on April 27. The match itself wasn't great, but the surprise ending and the build-up made it fantastic.

GARY ZIMAK: The Chigusa Nagayo vs. Lioness Asuka match that took place on February 23 was probably one of the best matches that I've ever seen. The intensity displayed was tremendous. One of the things I like about Japanese wrestling is that you can have two tag team partners wrestle each other in a very brutal, strong-style match and then shake hands at the end. It seems that in the U.S., whenever two friends wrestle each other, the resulting match usually proves to be quite dull.

#### ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

1. BRIAN PILLMAN (137) . . . . .788
2. Shane Douglas (72) . . . . .622
3. Biff Wellington . . . . .267
4. Doug Furnas (12) . . . . .176
5. Ron Simmons (15) . . . . .144

Honorable Mention: Hiroshi Wajima 119, John Tenta 117, Johnny Ace 99, The Terminator 71, Steve Cox 60

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Barry Windham  
1981 - Brad Rheingans and Brad  
Armstrong (tied)  
1982 - Steve Williams  
1983 - Road Warriors  
1984 - Tom Zenk and Keiichi Yamada  
(tied)  
1985 - Jack Victory  
1986 - Bam Bam Bigelow

Brian Pillman is the best. He's already doing some crazy flying stuff and has the best dropkick in wrestling. He's still green in moves on his feet, but his work rate is there and potential there to be sure. Biff Wellington hasn't gotten the push, but for pure technical work, does a good job and doesn't wrestle like a green guy. He's nothing spectacular yet but of all the rookies, he's the most solid and that's why I went with him for second place. Before picking third, I've got to say that I've seen Doug Furnas a lot, and I think he's terribly overrated. The potential is there, but his repertoire is limited to a few great acrobatic moves but he simply can't work a match and has to be led hand and foot through a match. Shane Douglas is good for a rookie and I'm picking him third, although John Tenta shows a lot of potential and impressed me while I was in Japan.

SMM: It's easy, Brian Pillman is already an excellent wrestler.

#### MANAGER OF THE YEAR

1. JIM CORNETTE (224) . . . . 1,268  
2. Paul E. Dangerously (42) . . 643  
3. Bobby Heenan (30) . . . . . 522  
4. Jimmy Hart (17) . . . . . 255  
5. Ichimasa Wakamatsu (22) . . . 117

Honorable Mention: J.J. Dillon 109,  
Downtown Bruno 89, Elizabeth 60

#### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1983 - Jimmy Hart  
1984 - Jimmy Hart  
1985 - Jim Cornette  
1986 - Jim Cornette

It's going to take a lot to get me to vote for someone other than Jim Cornette. His interviews clinched it for him this year, and his work live is the best I've seen as well. I picked Bobby Heenan second purely for his work in getting Andre the Giant over at Wrestlemania, because overall he's gotten tiresome and repetitive. J.J. Dillon was great in a few skits and plays his role well, but how can you have much respect for a guy who spends his interview time blatantly kissing his superiors' behind. Third place goes to Paul E. Dangerously, who decidedly isn't kissing his superiors' behind when he does interviews and has become the most talked about thing in the AWA.

JON KARESH: It's tough deciding between first and second. I'm picking Dangerously since he's virtually the only good thing about the AWA. Cornette seems regrettably to be held back. Heenan did a great job building up Wrestlemania, but has gotten repetitive.

Mr. MIKE: Why not give it to the new guy? Dangerously is great on the mike and does good impersonations. He did very well working with very little. Jimmy Hart did much better than expected this year. He gets plenty of heat even though he's pushed as the WWF's No. 2 manager. Jim Cornette is still the funniest and smartest guy around, but was really toned down and underused this year. He needs a fresh injection of new scenery and different babyfaces to work off of.

SCOTT HUDSON: Paul E. Dangerously is funny as hell to me. Cornette is funny but he and the Midnight have faded from the spotlight.

JEFF ARCHEY: Cornette is good but I don't feel right about picking him first. Dangerously is excellent but he rode on Idol's coat-tails in the CWA. Heenan is first for me. He's taken a group of wrestlers that aren't nearly as good as Eaton or Lane and has gotten them over. Getting Andre over is enough to convince me.

KLON BRODY: I'm going to buck the crowd and pick Paul E. Reason is that no major feuds or angles involved Cornette for most of the year, at least not compared to previous years. It takes more than great talking to win manager of the year.

JEFF BOWDREN: Long may King Cornette reign. Dangerously shows good potential and has a nice gimmick with the telephone. I picked Slick third. How could I leave off a man who gave us a song called "Jive Soul Bro?" Besides, I loved the way he said, "Braw-tha." He was also the best part of the Bigelow skit. Bigelow glared at him and Slick backs up, saying, "My man...braw-tha....blood?"

GARY ZIMAK: As long as Jim Cornette is active in wrestling, this award is basically competition for second place. I ranked J.J. Dillon second because I feel he plays his unique role very well. I enjoy his portrayal of an intellectual businessman type manager. It's a refreshing change of pace from many of the maniacal lunatic types. Paul Dangerously is No. 3 based on his hilarious interviews. I feel he's got a lot of talent and will probably go far in the business if he doesn't get himself killed first.



### BEST TV ANNOUNCER

1. LANCE RUSSELL (144) . . . . . 960
2. Jim Ross (92) . . . . . 864
3. Tony Schiavone (31) . . . . . 585
4. Wakabayashi (31) . . . . . 155
5. Gordon Solie (10) . . . . . 147

Honorable Mention: Vince McMahon 90,  
Hosaka 90, Ed Whelan 72

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1981 - Gordon Solie  
1982 - Gordon Solie  
1983 - Gordon Solie  
1984 - Lance Russell  
1985 - Lance Russell  
1986 - Lance Russell

Lance Russell isn't the best play-by-play man in the game, but he's definitely the best host of a wrestling show. He's entirely believable and totally inoffensive, and works with a lot of green personnel on a live show and somehow gets everyone through it with class. If you've seen a few clips of him doing play-by-play on Pro Wrestling this Week, you aren't seeing what I appreciate most about Russell. If you get the weekly tapes from Memphis you'll know what I mean.

I can't pick any Japanese announcers because I don't understand what they are saying, but they can't be worse than some of the folks here.

Vince McMahon is good when his ego isn't getting in the way of things or he's not on network television. I think that amounts to about 30 seconds per week.

Jim Ross gets second because he does impart excitement to the telecast. He's great during a good match. He tries to hard, however. Trying to make everything a superlative and trying to sell bad matches as exciting ones doesn't work. He should save the heavy emphasis to the great stuff. Actually my favorite thing about Ross, and this goes for Russell as well, is that they never treat the fans with contempt. They talk to the crowd like they are made up of intelligent human beings and aren't condescending. That's what kills too many of the announcers, particularly one overweight baboon from Titan Sports.

Tony Schiavone is okay, but I hate giving him third place on a default. Don Koss is good and easy to listen to, but comes across as ignorant of the wrestling world around him. Jack Gregory isn't bad, especially considering he just started. Actually I expect he'll wind up as one of the better ones. Dave Brown is totally inoffensive, but comes off as having little personality either. Bob Caudile fits in the same category, maybe a little more personality, but probably in other ways not as good. For some reason he makes me laugh. Gordon Solie was the

greatest, but so was Gordie Howe and I'd hate to watch him skate today. Jeez, I guess I'll go with Brown third.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Jim Ross is the best. He comes off on camera as an "average Joe" without the least bit of pretentiousness.

CHARLES HODGKISSON: The best way to describe Lance Russell is a total professional who is a star in his own right. Yet he never gets in the way when it's time to let the wrestlers have the spotlight.

GARY ZIMAK: In my opinion, nobody comes close to Lance Russell. His smooth delivery and subtle sense of humor makes watching Memphis wrestling a real treat. He never tries to steal the show and always seems to bring out the best in people who are basically green at doing interviews. I wish some of the more overbearing announcers would learn something from him. In second is the king of the cliches, Gordon Solie. For some reason, he gets a lot of criticism from smart fans, but I enjoy listening to him call a match. I don't care if he's making up things as he goes along, it sounds legitimate to me. Tony Schiavone is excellent but he could stand to learn a little more about wrestling, such as the names of a few holds.

RYAN CLARK: Nobody enhances the talents of those around him like Lance Russell. On play-by-play, Jim Ross is the best even though he does get carried away from time-to-time. Tony Schiavone is okay, but he's far from being a great wrestling announcer.

### WORST TV ANNOUNCER

1. DAVID CROCKETT (183) . . . . . 1,047
2. Bill Mercer (26) . . . . . 354
3. Gino Monsoon (20) . . . . . 295
4. Rod Trongard (15) . . . . . 279
5. Vince McMahon (15) . . . . . 148

Honorable Mention: Larry Nelson 100,  
David McLane 93, Mark Lawrence 90,  
Mike McGuirk 69, Rock Hunter 69,  
Kuromichi 68

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

1984 - Angelo Mosca  
1985 - Gorilla Monsoon  
1986 - David Crockett

Okay, David Crockett is the absolute worst. It was close a year ago, but he's "improved" so much in '87 that it's no contest at all. Bill Mercer clinched second place with his comments on the birthplace of John Nord. I guess Hot Rod Trongard has to get third. Every time I listen to him and Verne Gagne together, I start screaming to myself that I wish they would realize it's no longer 1957. I mean when Nick Kiniski was talking about being Canada's greatest athlete and they start rattling off names of

great Canadian hockey players, none of whom played during the lifetime of the majority of their viewing audience, well, you get the picture. Lord Blears isn't much better. Nostalgia is fine, but at least pretend your brain didn't stop functioning when the Russians sent up Sputnik. Mike McGuirk was pretty horrible as well. At least Missy Hyatt added some personality.

Mr. MIKE: A shame to have to play favorites. Gorilla Monsoon is pompous and obnoxious, but he can at least describe wrestling in a normal decibel range. Bill Mercer is as good as ever, but we managed to largely miss him this year, while Barry Richards is dead and buried. David Crockett gets first, he we include his brand of shill swill as announcing. He does elicit some good barbs from a few of the boys. He appears to be a popular figure throughout the Crockett organization. Rod Trongard gets second. Why say anymore about the Rancid one? It might go to his head, and there's lots of room up there. Milt Avruskin gets third. I heard about 18 seconds of him this year via quickie Montreal clips on Pro Wrestling this Week. It was enough to reconfirm to me how truly insufferable Uncle Miltie still is.

PETER LUNDERO: I know David Crockett is terrible, but I've always felt that there is a certain type of fan that he appeals to, thus he isn't completely useless. Lord Al Hayes is, however, and he's just about the only amateurish element on the WWF telecasts. I didn't hear Angelo Mosca in Canada, but based on past experience, he's got to be in second place.

GARY ZIMAK: David Crockett is simply the worst announcer in wrestling. Listen to him call a match makes root canal work seem like a birthday party. Bill Mercer is so tremendously horrible that he's almost enjoyable. Sometimes I enjoy the satire of him. How could someone announce wrestling for more than 25 years and yet know absolutely nothing about wrestling?

CHARLES HODGKISSON: It's hard sorting out three names from the hundreds who qualify. However, Bill Mercer wins for his geography lessons prior to leaving World Trash. Second goes to Billy "Red" Lyons and third to Milt Avruskin. Milt has been the

announcer for two promotions that went under in 1987, Pro Wrestling Canada and International, and will probably make it a hat trick with the AWA.

JOHNNY BLACK: Bobby Heenan. All he does in contradict the other announcers. It gets tiring to hear someone say "no" every time someone else says, "yes."

JON KARESH: David Crockett has got to be the worst wrestling announcer of all-time. He reminds me of a 16-year-old illiterate fan who knows nothing about the sport. His announcing consists of 1) Five word shrieks like "Morton does a dropkick!!!" or "He almost pinned him!! He almost pinned him!!!" or "Garvin's on his feet!! He's on his feet!!" or 2) Inane babyface compliments like "As Flair found out, Ron's the best" or "The Road Warriors--the Midnight Express will find out how tough they really are" or "Barry Windham--the pride of the NWA." Then there's insults to the heels like, "Well Ric, I guess Precious just didn't want to him much to do with you" or "That'll teach you to mess with the American Dream" or "You'll never want to get into that cage." And do you think that just once, Rod Trongard could come up with a different introduction than, "Hello again everyone and welcome to the Showboat Sports Pavilion and the AWA, the Major League of Professional Wrestling, seen coast to coast and border to border in San Francisco, Chicago, Denver, Salt Lake City, Japan, Canada and around the world, and with me is the champ himself, Verne Gagne....."

SMM: David Crockett is the champ here. I feel sorry for Mercer because he appears to be senile. Monsoon doesn't bother me all that much. Mike McGuirk is horrible, though. Gordon Solie has totally lost it and Vince sucks, but I grew up watching him and he didn't used to be this bad.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Gorilla Monsoon is the worst hot air disaster to come out of New York since the Hindenburg disaster. You don't get that redundant waiting around for a bus.

KURT BROWN: My favorite quote was by Rock Hunter on Deep South: "When I wrestled, they called that move a Russian leg sweep, but nowadays they call that move something else."



## CATEGORY B -- WINNERS JUDGED BY MOST FIRST PLACE VOTES

### BEST WRESTLING MOVE

1. KEIICHI YAMADA'S SHOOTING STAR PRESS. . . . .49
2. Diamond & Tanaka's slingshot DDT . . . . .45
3. Masa Saito's Saito suplex. . .27
4. Jake Roberts' DDT. . . . .20
5. Owen Hart's flip off the ropes into an armlock. . . . .19

Honorable Mention: Keiji Muto's moonsault press 18, Randy Savage's flying elbow drop 11, New Breed's crotch drop double team move 11, Midnight Express' rocket launcher 10, Midnight Express' divorce court 10, Owen Hart's blind sunset flip 9, Silver King's moonsault attack 9, Owen Hart's dives into the audience 9, Yumi Ogura's tombstone pile driver off the middle ropes 9, Road Warriors clothesline off the top ropes 8

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Jimmy Snuka's Superfly splash
- 1982 - Super Destroyer's (Scott Irwin) superplex
- 1983 - Jimmy Snuka's Superfly splash
- 1984 - Davey Boy Smith's power clean in combination with Dynamite Kid's dropkick off the top ropes
- 1985 - Tiger Mask's dive, with a mid-air flip, outside the ring
- 1986 - Chavo Guerrero's back flip flying body press

Masa Saito's "Saito suplex" gets me off my chair every time I see it, but nothing beats Keiichi Yamada's "shooting star press."

GARY ZIMAK: Yumi Ogura's tomb stone pile driver off the second rope was definitely the best and meanest looking move I've seen all year. Unfortunately, it was the most dangerous, and resulted in a broken neck for one of her opponents and the subsequent banning of the hold.

### HARDEST WORKER

1. RIC FLAIR. . . . .269
2. Masaharu Funaki. . . . .24
3. Bret Hart. . . . .11
4. Masa Saito . . . . .10
5. Chigusa Nagayo . . . . .9

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1983 - Dynamite Kid
- 1984 - Ric Flair
- 1985 - Ric Flair
- 1986 - Ric Flair

When the bandage came off Ric Flair's chest and you could practically see his internal organs working through the transparent skin, the answer to this one was obvious.

KIM WOOD: How would you like to have Ron Garvin slap the shit out of you every night for two straight months?

### BIGGEST SHOCK OF THE YEAR

1. CROCKETT PURCHASES THE UWF. .105
2. Mike Von Erich's suicide death48
3. Honkeytonk wins IC title. . . 31
4. The fall of the NWA . . . . .27
5. Ron Garvin wins NWA title . . 20

Honorable Mention: Death of Haru Sonoda in plane crash 18, Akira Maeda "shoot-kicks" Riki Choshu 11, Fall of New Japan 11

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Tommy Rich holding NWA title
- 1982 - Otto Wanz winning AWA title
- 1983 - Harley Race winning NWA title
- 1984 - Death of David Von Erich
- 1985 - WWF getting on network television
- 1986 - Magnum T.A.'s auto accident

The UWF buy out was something I was well aware of for several weeks before it came to fruition. It wasn't that big a surprise. Sadly, the Mike Von Erich suicide was inevitable as well. The biggest surprise was the utter failure of Jim Crockett Promotions to take advantage of what it had. They had a great television network, which they destroyed by repetition. A great talent crew which they destroyed by keeping the same stale guys in the spotlight and "killing off" the newcomers. All that potential and they've sunk so far so fast that I have serious doubt of their ability to turn it around.

RYAN CLARK: It wasn't a shock that Flair lost the title, but that Crockett gave it to Garvin was unbelievable.

JOE LANCELLO: Bill Watts selling the UWF to Jim Crockett. This literally ruined an entire weekend. And if I'd known how skillfully Crockett would combine the two circuits, the depression would have lasted until the next weekend.

KIM WOOD: Bum Bright being critical of Tom Landry after Bright had become involved with Fritz Von Erich's promotional activities.

KLON BRODY: Dusty Rhodes and Jim Crockett destroying without serious thought the best promotion in America. What idiots would take a top-rated and highly-respected promotion like the UWF and turn it into manure without thought of what could have become their bread and butter. They deserve what they have gotten. For a long time, I wanted to see JCP battle Vince face-to-face and now I hope they fail.